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ALICIA DE LACY;

AN

HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

VOL. II.

Strahan and Preston,
Printers-Street, London.

ALICIA DE LACY;

AN

HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE LOYALISTS," &c.

Wisdom in sable garb array'd,
Immers'd in rapturous thought profound,
And Melancholy, silent maid,
With leaden eye that loves the ground,
Still on thy solemn steps attend:
Warm Charity, the general friend,
With Justice, to herself severe,
And Pity, dropping soft the sadly-pleasing tear.

Gray's Ode to Adversity.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

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ALICIA DE LACY.

CHAPTER XII.

For contemplation he and valour form'd;
For softness she, and sweet attractive grace.
MILTON.

ALICIA has hitherto been presented to the reader's eye in the not uncommon character of a fair heiress, desperately in love, and aiming to surmount the obstacles which interposed to defeat her wishes. She interested a heart which devotion and patriotism had rendered insensible to the common snares of beauty, by discovering corresponding sentiments at a first interview, and, without designing to deceive, love taught her, as often as she

met the man whose affection she languished to secure, to adopt the manners and opinions which she knew he approved. Accustomed to hear her father express his stern abhorrence of that prodigal waste of time, treasure, and talents, which diverted the King from his royal duties, she persuaded herself that she detested the luxury and indulgence of the court; and that a retired life, devoted to contemplation and solitude, was most adapted to her taste. She would, indeed, banish the austere Father Ambrose from her cell; but in his stead, besides the hour-glass, maple-dish, and cross bones, she pictured that abode as containing a princely hermit. While her eye pursued through the courtly circle one majestic figure, she had no superfluous admiration to bestow on the embroidered scarfs or plumed bonnets that pretended to eclipse his native dignity; and the hope that one smile, full of meaning, or a

whisper, half implying approbation, would testify that Lord Lancaster's thoughts could sometimes be diverted from musing on England's wrongs, rendered it impossible for her to hear the garrulous flatteries of those who spoiled an ingenious compliment by their dull repetition, or fancied they looked enchanting by distorting their faces, or twisting their persons into affected postures. She had no time to bestow on those triflers; all they did or said was disgusting, because it diverted her from a sublime study. A squirrel might be held in a wicker cage, but she was contriving to ensnare a lion: the difficulty of such an achievement enhanced the value of the prize, and induced her to forget, what consideration would have told her, that those who aspire to glory must prepare themselves to encounter difficulty, and endure sorrow.

From the time of her receiving Lord Surrey's letter, Alicia perceived a differ-

ence in the behaviour of Lancaster, indicating, that he equally despised the presumption which affected to set her at liberty, and the arrogance that threatened the exercise of her freedom. The menaces of a malignant and potent rival constituted a stimulus to an heroic mind; and his declaration of fervent affection was only withheld by his scrupulous desire to prevent either the lady's fame from being committed, or a breach in the public harmony.

The Earl of Lincoln, enthusiastic in his admiration of Lancaster, seemed to withdraw his thoughts from the grave of his young heir, to contemplate the ripened worth of one to whom it was the avowed wish of his heart that his vast hereditaments might be conveyed by an auspicious alliance. But in proportion as Alicia saw the difficulties that impeded her long-cherished hopes diminish, the caprice that indulgence

had fostered in her disposition, tempted her to practise those wayward arts which lessen the value of the female character by impeaching its sincerity. The pilgrimage to Palestine was, by the unanimous advice of the ordainers, suspended, till the impoverished country could spare the remittance it would divert from claims connected with its vital interests. There was no longer any talk of Lord Lancaster's becoming grand master of the knights-templars; his interference in their favour terminated with the King's promising to suspend his decree for their suppression, till their advocates were confronted with their accusers, and evidence examined on the validity of the charges urged against them. It was known that the Queen of Navarre advised her son to marry, and take an active part in the government. With one of these injunctions he had complied, being named president of the council; and the change

in his manners augured an intention to fulfil the other. He was now rather grave than austere, dejection changed to serenity, and a condescending relaxation, often amounting to decorous chearfulness, brought him near the level of other men. "Ah, Lancaster," said the exulting beauty to herself, "at last, then, you are my captive. But it is impossible to resist the pleasure of making you feel for the trouble you have cost me; and though I do not mean to be very inexorable, I must see you court my smiles, fear my frowns, and dance attendance on my sovereign will."

Confirmed by her confidant, Beatrice, in her resolution of tyrannizing, Lady Alicia passed over in her mind a hundred whimsical moods, pondering in which she should receive the hourly-expected declaration. What, if she were to lift her eyes to heaven, invoke Saint Ursula and all her virgins, and

protest her inclination for a cloister, cautiously softening that avowal by alluding to her father's prohibition of her taking the veil. What, if she were to propose previous conditions, enlarge on the Queen's friendship, and stipulate that she must reside at court. Again, suppose she were to require a magnificent establishment at a separate castle. Rich attire and gay festivals, she now discovered, were much more pleasant and congenial to her taste than the spare fasts, the tedious vigils, the monotonous routine of matins, lauds, vespers, and nocturns, which had employed her youth; and if the Earl of Lancaster's habits leaned too much that way, as Beatrice asserted, a hint of her having been already satiated might be useful. The confidant eloquently argued in favour of express and minute stipulations, urging her lady not to trust too much to the power of those conquering glances which her father told her shot

from her eyes, nor to the playfulness which had often disarmed his rage, or the tears that melted his firmest purposes. Such grave, steady men as Lord Lancaster generally made stern husbands, the most intractable race of animals in the world, who were always expecting people to act from reason, and to be to-day the same as yesterday. The girl's loquacity was interrupted by her lady's apparent displeasure. She was not going, she said, to embark on the voyage of life with a Friar Ambrose, cold to all the social affections, and absorbed in the wild reveries of monastic ambition. The Earl of Lancaster, though grave and devout, was a knight, and a gentleman of princely race and courtly breeding, learned, enlightened, and courteous. Beatrice was most happy to hear this good account of him, for his merit had not its due praise among the Queen's ladies of honour. Of this she was certain, that her dear lady's

super-eminent deserts and large inheritance deserved a husband made on purpose for her, and comprizing the very best qualities of all the fine men she knew: as handsome as the King, without his love of low dissipation; as accomplished as Gaveston, without his vanity and insolence; as amiable as Gloucester, without his timid modesty; as spirited as Warwick, without his impetuosity; Beatrice ventured to add, and as gallant, splendid, and generous as the Earl of Surrey, without his inconstancy; but Alicia shuddering, kissed her crucifix, and prayed the Virgin to preserve her from a murderer. The courageous attendant was not silenced by this rebuff; but begged her lady to distinguish between a brave gentleman, generous and accomplished, who, though he had done some rash things in his youth, was deeply enamoured of a beautiful lady who might reform him,

and change him into an excellent husband; and a cruel, fierce Saracen, whose trade it was to shut up ladies in castles, and bury knights in dungeons. "I command thee silence on that theme," said Alicia; "name no more the mock generosity of affecting to liberate me from my vows, and denouncing vengeance on all who shall presume to avail themselves of my freedom."

It was after some of these discussions, to which the confidential intimacy then existing between ladies of high rank, and those who performed the double duty of attendants and companions often gave rise, that Lady Alicia was interrupted by the Earl of Warwick, who came, he said, as the harbinger of one whose high deserts needed no advocate to plead his suit. Lord Lancaster was closetted with her father, urging a request which could not be denied. Alicia assumed the high disdain of beauty, and observed, it would

be of no importance for her to know the purport, if she had no voice in the determination.

"My fair cousin," answered Warwick, while a playful mischief laughed in his eye, "how does your quick intelligence outstep my halting narrative. I might reply to this pretty pouting, by asking, whence springs the self-accusing consciousness, that implies your bright eyes have betrayed the lapse of your truant heart? What, if Lancaster requests that he may be your champion, and preserve you from the snare of a bold ravisher; if you mean to repay his kindness only with disdain, even sort out your bridal decorations, and let your sumpter mule follow your palfrey, for by this time tomorrow the fear of your mother's malediction will not prevent you from suing to become Lord Surrey's wife." He then acquainted her with the plot confessed by Eubulo, which Lancaster sus-

pected was a snare laid for himself. It might, however, be otherwise. Alicia turned deadly pale, and Warwick asked her if she was disposed to fulfil the contract.

"Never, never." The image of the twin lilies floating down the Dee, of their distracted mother, of her own dear lost William, all rose to her recollection. With clasped hands she protested death was preferable; but recovering herself, exclaimed, "Why am I thus alarmed? Ah, Warwick, there is a wicked pleasantry in your look which contradicts your affected seriousness. My father is a mighty baron, and can I fear violence, when he can bring into the field five hundred men at arms, with crested helmets and quilted surcoats, and thrice that number of skilful archers? Is he not owner of nine walled castles; and would not the north and the south, the east and the west, at his bidding array themselves for my preservation?"

"You forget," said Warwick, "that to-morrow is the time of danger; and the array you speak of consists of peaceful yeomen, now reposing in their own dwellings. Nor are you in one of your father's castles, but in a treacherous court, leagued to abet the ravisher's designs." He further reminded her, that the distracted state from which the kingdom had just emerged, and the necessity that all parties should unite in its preservation, determined the barons who were faithful to the cause of their country, to abstain from appealing to arms in arbitrement of private wrong, but to submit to injury, till the slow but peaceable decision of the laws should do them justice. Impatient of the terms to which he had submitted, the King only waited for an occasion to charge the popular lords with breach of contract; and how would the patriotism, how would the delicacy of Lady Alicia endure the idea of being the ostensible

fire-brand that kindled the flame of civil war."

"Oh, send me to one of my father's castles!" was the lady's next request.

Warwick replied, that duty fixed De Lacy and his friends about the King's person, but Surrey had no state appointment, and was at liberty to pursue her to any of those retreats. His mock banditti might be stationed on any other road; and forests and caverns could be found equally convenient for his purposes near Canford, Denbigh, Pontefract, Chester, or Lincoln, as at Windsor. The terrified Alicia wept, and asked how she could be preserved. Warwick answered, there was a retreat safe and honourable, pointed out by wisdom, guarded by courage, sanctioned by religion, lighted by love. When manners were generally corrupt, when the mighty were dissolute and the rabble lawless, an honourable husband was the only guardian to which richly-

portioned beauty could intrust its treasures and its charms. The Earl of Lancaster, with the single-heartedness of true affection, despised his own peril, to place the object of his generous love in honourable security. The wife of a prince of the blood-royal was too sacredly protected by the laws to fear violence. The Queen of Navarre would receive her as a daughter, and supply, by her wisdom and magnanimity, that maternal protection which Lady Margaret had renounced. The King considered Kenilworth as a sanctuary; marriage would release her from her attendance on the Queen; her confessor had pronounced her absolved in conscience from her contract; and Surrey would be but a perverse arguer, if, after signing her manumission, he presumed to call her to account as his slave."

"You read my eyes, fair Lady Alicia," continued Warwick, bending to look in

her face, " permit me also to learn the language of yours. By the sword of Guy, 'tis hatred, fixed disgust, insurmountable aversion to my friend. What, though his birth is princely, his disposition noble, his possessions royal; I was deceived when I fancied those anxious looks, which covertly watched his movements, and that breathless admiration which hung on every word he uttered, marked the willing servitude of a captivated heart. But the empire of beauty must yield its petty tyranny, when potent enemies threaten its destruction. If Lancaster is not worthy to protect you confidentially, name to me which of the suitors who bow in your train you think meet to prefer, and I doubt not, although inferior in merit, the selected lover will be more liberal in profession, and as prompt in accepting the task imposed by your preference."

" Ungenerous Warwick," replied Alicia, " are there no reasons which

should make me hesitate. Has Lord Lancaster ever evinced that desire to win my affections, which would assure me of the state of his own?"

"His merits wooed you," answered Beauchamp. "Let meaner lovers apply to Cupid's text-book for that eloquence which props the cause of doubtful desert; and what more manly proof can he give you of the force of his affection, than to brave, for your sake, the enmity of the most proud and inexorable baron in England, whose revenge, like a covered fire, will burn the fiercest because it must be concealed."

"Surely," replied Alicia, "honour requires me to avoid exposing his generosity to such peril."

"That reason," replied Warwick, "holds its force in respect to every other champion, and dooms you to be the undefended victim of Surrey's violence. But prefer that plea personally, and if

you urge it with the same look of winning gentleness and sweet surrender you now use, I mistake much if it will not have the same effect on my friend; the threats of proud Surrey rendering him more determined to devote his life to your service. But the night wears; your safety depends on prompt decision, and I came to conduct you instantly to your father."

As Warwick hurried Alicia to Lord Lincoln's pavilion, her heart throbbed with contrary emotions; even coquetry was not excepted: and she recollected, but could not arrange the proposed stipulations. Joy was subdued by the delicate apprehension that maiden pride had been defrauded of its just prerogative; that she had been won before she was wooed; that pity, or any other motive than real preference, induced Lancaster to offer a protection, which seemed, on his part, a gift, while the hand she bestowed was rather the suppliant's plea for aid, than

the reward of faithful service. With these fears, sufficient to alarm any delicate mind, were mixed regrets peculiar to this gay young beauty. She had not proved the power her mirror told her she possessed; and what superiority would a husband assume, who, as a lover, had never trembled at her frowns, sued for her smile, nor waited on her caprices; had never appeared weakly miserable, nor ridiculously elated; had given no proofs that he would succumb to her will, or even allow her to be the guide of her own actions? But then this terrible Surrey, — though there was somewhat like attachment in his persevering pretensions, and though he might, as Beatrice said, be less of a monster than her settled aversion described him; yet the dark design of his eye, the measured amenity of his smile, ever fearful of sliding into the grin of malevolence; the studied courtliness of his compliments, the hurrying impetuosity of

his vivacity——An involuntary shudder chilled her blood as she sketched this portrait, and she shrunk with contempt from her own wayward caprices, in doubting if she could be happy with a husband whom every one revered. Margaret of Gloucester wept in secret for the disgraces and follies of Gaveston, whom in public she attempted to defend. Queen Isabella avoided all allusions to her royal consort, from a consciousness that nothing could be said in his praise; but on one topic she could always be eloquent, the good deeds of the Earl her husband.

If Warwick would not hurry her along so fast, and give her time to recollect her scattered thoughts, perhaps in her manner of receiving his addresses she might impress the mind of her princely lover with a conviction that she was not wholly unworthy to be considered as the partner of his fortunes. But she was already in the presence of her father: he looked

paler than usual, as he lay extended on his pallet conversing with Lord Lancaster, who stood unbonnetted by his side, with an air so expressive of respect and humility, as re-assured the agitated maiden, while turning her eyes from her princely lover, she sunk on her knees by her father's couch, and craved to know his pleasure.

The Earl of Lincoln rose, and as he embraced his darling, she felt the feeble flutterings of his overlaboured heart.—"My child," said he, "while I had power to draw this sword from its scabbard, thou hadst no need of any other protector; but now, even thy soft arm slides from my grasp. Beloved of my soul, to whom shall I entrust thee? Thy mother has forsaken thee, limiting her influence to those secluded walls my will forbids thee to enter. A snare is laid for thy freedom, thy honour, thy peace. These re-

peated alarms hasten an old man's journey to the grave. I would not be deprived of all I love, before I receive the parting viaticum. I would reserve one hand, the pressure of which would fall grateful on my closing eyes. When the richly laden vine is unsupported, the basest foot treads on its produce; but marry it to the stately elm, and it forms a purple canopy, luxuriant and secure from spoliation. Behold in this illustrious head of the Lancastrian Plantagenets, a protector given thee by thy father; and, princely Earl, with the full fee of all my possessions, secured to thee and thy heirs, receive the last and dearest of my children as an especial trust; and Heaven so deal with thee as thou art kind and just to her."

Was this a moment for stipulated rights, for affected levity, or coy disdain? Lancaster, with one knee bent to the ground, and with the same look of reverent lowliness as when he first met her

in his pilgrim's garb, received Alicia's hand from her father. "Mine is a proud heart, Lady," said he, "yet would I not confine my gratitude for this vast influx of happiness to the partial generosity of thy venerated father. If I part with this fair hand, which now trembles like a captive in my grasp, wilt thou again bestow it as the signification of thy free choice, and the invaluable reward of my solemn avowal, that not the earldoms which are given as thy dower, nor yet the unrivalled beauty of thy person, would have withdrawn my regards from that Heaven which gave thee beauty, were I not convinced that this consummate loveliness ranks least among thy abundant graces?"

What could Alicia answer? She was most inclined to avow, that the desire of her soul was to deserve her high fortunes, in being united to a man whom she held

dearer than all her natural or adventitious advantages; but on occasions when language is incapable of interpreting the heart, nature explains her sentiment by the usual associate of strong susceptibility, the unequivocal expression of an intelligent countenance. Alicia restored her yielded hand to Lancaster, with a salute that spoke tenderness rather than joy. Then hastily turning from the lord of her future destiny, she fixed her eyes on the ghastly countenance of him from whom she had derived her being; and throwing herself into his arms with an intensity of affection which, while it seemed to exclude every other object, more especially endeared her to Lancaster, exclaimed, "My dearest, dearest father, who will minister to your infirmities if I must leave you?"

"A grateful country and a gracious God," answered the Earl of Lincoln, as

with renovated strength he rose from his couch and commanded Father Ambrose to perform the ceremony. When the wedded pair knelt for his benediction, and he embraced his daughter as Countess of Lancaster, it seemed as if that name, like a consecrated amulet, conferring security and peace, instantaneously checked the ravages of decay. Raising his eyes to heaven, De Lacy invoked the spirits of his glorious ancestors, calling on them to observe, that he had given them a representative worthy of their inheritance. "The virtues and the renown of the Lacies and the Longspees," said he, "rest upon thee. Be thou, Alicia, chaste and duteous as the matrons from whom thou art sprung; binding to our house, with a band of adamant, this stately pillar, whose firmness will secure its durability and thy safety. And now, when the angel of death smites me to the

dust, weep not for the removal of an old man, whose task in life is concluded; but lay my corpse among my ancestors, and fill my place with benigner influence and happier fortunes."

CHAP. XIII.

'Tis the mind that makes the body rule;
And as the sun breaks through the darkest night,
So honour peereth in the meanest habit.
What! is the jay more precious than the lark,
Because the feathers are more beautiful?

SHAKESPEARE.

THE Earl of Lancaster requested a private audience of the King, to ask a few days delay in his attendance at Westminster, and assigned as a cause for his absence his intention of escorting his wife to Kenilworth. Edward, starting, repeated the word wife! Lancaster replied, most assuredly he was married, and to the heiress of the Earl of Lincoln. His manner spoke the calm magnanimity of conscious power and steady rectitude, as he respectfully waited the King's reply.

After a little hesitation, "We must," said the courteous prince, "rejoice in an event which binds the services of our dear and illustrious cousin to us and to his country; yet must we also complain of secrecy and precipitation, seeming to doubt our approbation, and preventing those public testimonials of good-will with which we would have joyfully celebrated such high espousals."

Lancaster answered, that an event which in itself constituted full felicity, was rather encumbered than improved by those pompous gratulations, which pained delicacy, and disturbed the still complacence of true delight. Nor did it become one who had so long acted the part of a censor, to permit in his own case the needless expence and vain frivolity he had so often condemned.

"Cousin," replied the King, "we cannot but hope that the auspicious choice on which we felicitate you, will induce

you to view with less austerity those happy reliefs to severe business, in which your fair bride lately appeared as the best ornament. We cannot allow the eclipse of that bright luminary, whose beams shone so sweetly on our court. Grave seclusion may suit the years of our royal aunt of Navarre, but every gallant of our train would suspect you of discourteous jealousy or unknightly fear, were you, while your state employments fix you near us, to cull this just opened rose from our bower, and hide it in a sanctuary."

"Should such degrading reflections be uttered," answered the Earl of Lancaster, "I trust my gracious prince will be my advocate. He knows I would not have married a woman I could suspect of light conduct. He also knows, that, as a knight, I only fear my Creator. But though chastity is a tower of strength to beauty, these, my liege, are not the days of Alfred, when a fair woman, with a

purse of gold in her hand, could traverse the kingdom in safety. Impunity for one crime encourages the commission of another; and he who has the temerity to brave the slumbering law, by concerting a deed of violence, is withheld from the accomplishment of his designs by no other restriction than their impracticability.

The King replied, that he perceived he alluded to the Earl of Surrey, and offered his services as a mediator. He declared that the first wish of his heart was peace. Peace with his subjects, peace with all the world. But the peace for which Edward sighed was not the security that rewards glorious and virtuous exertion, nor the blessed pacification announced at the advent of incarnate Deity. His desires pointed to the torpor of voluptuousness, the slumber of sloth, undisturbed by those cares which delight ambition, and stimulate fortitude. From a wish to lower the high reproving

tone of Lancaster's virtue to the standard of the parasites who misgoverned his ductile mind, the King desired to keep him and his consort exposed to the atmosphere of a licentious court, which, joined to the blandishments of the fair Alicia, must, he thought, transform the austere censor into a contented copyist of the habits he formerly despised. He offered his mediation between the rival earls for a similar reason, namely, that Lancaster, bribed by the undisturbed possession of his wife, might not oppose his attempt to retain Gaveston, which was the first measure he intended to propose to the parliament.

Lancaster answered, that the high rank which he held in the state made it impossible for him to fear Lord Surrey. If after liberating Lady Alicia from vows, which her premature age rendered nugatory on her part, he was disposed to question the use she had made of her

freedom, his sword was as long and as keen as that earl's, and his vassals as numerous. Nor would the law, which spread its ample shield over the meanest, refuse its protection to the first subject in the realm. If, on the other side, Surrey desired reconciliation, he was willing to give the hand of amity. But retaining his opinion, that even in this latter case it was inexpedient to fan the flame which want of fuel would soonest extinguish, he should deposit his dearest treasure at Kenilworth; where the company of his adopted sister, and august mother, would afford that endearing solace which an ingenuous mind vainly seeks in the hurry of mixed society.

Had Lancaster intimated his intention of retiring from the management of public affairs, and secluding himself with his fair bride, most willingly would the King have commuted for the "eclipse of that bright star," on seeing at the same time

the portentous planet, whose influence malign he most dreaded, retire from his immediate horizon. But he knew the man. Immoveably steady to his principles, he would remain a watcher of his actions; a perpetual monitor to remind him of his promises, and to prevent their violation. It was only by Alicia's influence that his character could be transformed; and that influence would be less efficacious, if only exerted at occasional interviews, than if uniformly acting upon his mind in all the various modulations of humour and feeling. Alicia too, young and flexible, might adopt the manners, as well as the principles, of Queen Blanche, and confirm the patriot she was desired to relax. For all these reasons she must be kept at court.

Unwilling to have recourse to the harshness of a command, the King resorted to less peremptory measures. He closeted Surrey; calmed the vehemence

of his rage; disclosed the line of conduct he wished him to adopt; and soon won his apparent coincidence. The interference of the Queen was again solicited. Never did Isabella exert it so willingly: the society of Alicia was indeed her peculiar delight. It had been publicly announced that she was likely to produce an heir to England; and she claimed the privileges annexed to her situation. She intreated, she conjured Lancaster, as a knight bound to a courteous attention to the requests of a princess, not to deprive her of her beloved friend, at a period when the solace of her society was necessary to her life. He did not know how very apt great ladies are to die and recover; but that the concession might come from her whose acquiescence would make it more peculiarly grateful, he answered, that Alicia should determine her future residence. Perhaps he would have yielded with less difficulty, had he not

esteemed it an important duty to watch over the lapses of his own heart, lest, if he did not sometimes deny himself the solace of her society, his strong affection for his enchanting partner should withdraw his mind from those stern exertions of talent and integrity which the times required.

In the meantime Warwick, rejoicing that the most formidable impediment to his hopes was removed, while he congratulated the young Countess of Lancaster on her happiness, alluded to his own amour. He described Kenilworth as a paradise fit for angels, and inhabited by beings of another world. He sketched the Queen of Navarre with great strength of colouring; but, undesignedly, made her rather grand than amiable. He dwelt largely on the virtues of Matilda, — his Matilda he now ventured to call her; —and in the openness of fraternal confidence, and the fullness of his regard for that

gentle maiden's peace, he endeavoured to awaken Alicia's sympathy for a rival, whom, secure in honourable possession, she could not fear, by owning the love he supposed she entertained for Lancaster. Voluble in the praises of one whom he avowed to be the mistress of his heart, he forgot that the theme which to him was music might be discordant to his auditor. He spoke of Matilda as a perfect being, whom it was an impossibility to emulate, and a duty to admire; whose love was all intellectual; whose manners were entirely faultless. He knew that they would be firm friends; but by the well remembered delicacy of maiden pride, he adjured Alicia to touch lightly on the topick which was most grateful to herself; to avoid the praises of her own beloved Lancaster; and to interest Matilda about Beauchamp, who only lived for her, though bound by her rigorous injunctions to avoid the subject of

love. Lady Lancaster faintly promised observance. She saw nothing so rapturously transporting in the paradise of Kenilworth. The turrets might be loftier, the arras more expensive, the park more spacious, and the covered parterres more curiously ornamented than those belonging to any of her father's castles, but the eye soon grew satiated with gazing on unvarying wonders. He described no stage plays and jugglers, minstrels or masking balls, or tournaments; Queen Blanche might be exemplary for discretion and charity, so was her own mother, the Lady Margaret; and yet, with a sigh that spoke no pleasing recollection of the maternal character, she fancied that her royal friend, Isabella, was the most agreeable companion. As for the fair paragon of perfection, the visionary captive of her unseen lord, and now self-devoted to singleness for his sake, though she was curious to see the features which had

failed to erase the impression of her own, early habit had rendered the society of those who conformed to her opinions, and reflected her manners, so easy and pleasant, that she had no wish to exchange it for the conversation of persons who, by Beauchamp's account, arrogated superiority; and, under the officious pretext of improvement, might be impertinent, or at least would, by their assumption of perfection, impose on her a painful restraint. A perpetual mental essay, purifying the thoughts of all adhesive dross, was a troublesome, mortifying occupation, tending either to insincerity or undue humiliation. It was much more agreeable to associate with those who let the mixed metal pass without applying the touchstone, and even took it thankfully, though, perhaps, they paid a still baser currency in return. If she was displeased, vapoured, (great ladies were, even then, subject to vapours dur-

ing an interruption of amusements,) mortified, or indisposed, Dorcas always tried to appease, and Beatrice attempted to divert her. In fine, though the Savoy palace (her lord's town residence) might not be so spacious as Kenilworth, nor Queen Isabella so learned and wise as her royal aunt, nor her own ladies so gentle, delicate, and refined as Matilda, her ideas of retirement were so connected with restraint, mortification, and chagrin as the associates of a lady in her baronial castle, that when Lancaster submitted her future residence to her choice, she only asked, if she might consider herself as secure from the violence of Surrey; and when her husband indignantly checked an apprehension injurious to his rank and power, she decided to accompany the court to London, with a promptitude which staggered his faith in that elevated turn of mind which he hitherto thought the basis of her cha-

racter, and he inquired the reasons of her preference.

Alicia, though a self-deceiver, was above the baseness of trying to deceive another. Among the motives which had decided her choice, was her reluctance to leave her lord; this she avowed, or rather implied, with a smile and blush of chaste affection. She then pleaded her duty to the Queen; but she faultered as she spoke, sensible that to give that name to self-indulgence was disingenuous. On the claims of filial piety she could speak with frankness and volubility; the Earl of Lincoln's advanced age, declining health, and destitution of domestic comforts. This argument was sufficiently cogent to silence the husband's apprehensions; and the fair bride, unpractised in the duty of self-examination, and ignorant how little weight these reasons really had on her decision, forbore to mention others, which almost without

her consciousness had really influenced her. Yet her sincerity was hurt at the transported admiration her lord bestowed on her duteous observance. Though a severe worshipper of truth, he adopted a style of florid compliment. He called her, not only the delight of his soul, but the guide of his conduct. "We must," he said, "divide the task of rendering your venerable father happy; and if my public occupations often call me from the couch on which, at the close of a long useful life, the warrior rests his toil-worn form, meditating the plans to which I must give efficiency, sweetest Alicia, account the additional visit which your tenderness pays him in my name, among the numerous undischarged obligations your happy husband will ever owe you."

Still Lancaster, though he doubted not his consort's prudence, felt apprehensions which he knew it would be indecorous,

and perhaps unworthy of himself and her, to acknowledge. The first time they met at court, Surrey held out his hand with an air of frankness, reminded him of his conduct at the tournament, and with well-tempered flattery, protested he was the only man in England whom he could patiently see reaping the profit of that conspiracy, against his love and his honour, which had been formed by base slander and narrow bigotry. But though his pride was not hurt by a preference, which being universal must be just, it was only his patriotism that had reluctantly counselled him to overlook the wrong old Lincoln had done him. This he should bear in mind, and perhaps when England wore a better aspect, his sense of it might speak in thunder. But the Earl of Lancaster was his friend, and he knew the force of that obligation on an honourable mind. There was much in this which that Earl disliked, which,

added to the presence of Gaveston, who still loitered near the King, gave him such a disgust to the court as, perhaps, generated fears and suspicions for which there was no just ground. Had not Alicia been educated in a guarded retirement? Had not her mind been early imbued with the strictest principles of patriotism and piety? Had she not refused, from the best motives, a man of corrupt character; and with unstained propriety passed warily through the dangerous labyrinth of admiration, so fatal to female rectitude and peace? Even in that preference which she now so sweetly avowed, had she not been so coyly secret that his own guarded observance was long ere it detected her latent love? It was impossible therefore that pleasure could debase or alienate her heart. Nothing but violence could tear her from him; and against that, while he affected a perfect security, he resolved to use every precaution his wisdom could

suggest, or his power supply. In all other respects he would leave her sole mistress of her own conduct.

A court residence being thus determined on, Lady Lancaster's first use of her independence was to arrange her household; and here she found able assistants and active advisers in the Queen and her own waiting damsels. The most difficult point was the confessor. Father Ambrose was imposed upon her by the Countess her mother; but with united voice the whole of her attendants protested they could not bear him. His look mildewed joy; his voice was the alarum of despair. Beatrice vowed she never could go to confession if he continued in the chair; and Dorcas spoke with horror of a penance which he had enjoined her, never to read a legend in which was any thing about love. She had tried to soften the rigor of this doom, by carefully obliterating the word wherever she met with

it; and now her conscience reproached her for defacing holy records. The Earl of Lancaster heard with wonder of his bride's objections to the early guide of her conscience; but Alicia persuaded him that his austere manners, and rugged temper, impeded rather than inspired devotion. She further said, it would be wrong to mortify the good man by fixing him in a spot where he would be continually turning up his eyes, and railing at abominations. He would be infinitely happier among the ruins of Bangor, planning the site of the monastery her mother intended to found, to pray for the soul of her brother, and all the family. A learned Augustine had been recommended to her, devout, polite, and liberal, Sir Hilary by name, humane in his character, and pleasing in his manners. In him piety appeared in a decent coif, and did not perpetually protrude

the exterminating baldness of the monastic tonsure.

As soon as the young Countess had arranged her establishment, she laid the plan before her lord. Beagles, falcons, palfreys, pages, and damsels were passed over with rapid assent. But he paused at some subsequent appointments. Either from pity of Lady Audley's sorrows, indignation at Surrey's crimes, or from the better motive of benevolence to a blind old man, she had hitherto retained Lloyd in her service as her own minstrel, and had often employed the hour of twilight in hearing him chaunt his piteous ditty; but she now thought his furrowed face and bending form, would ill become the laced ruff, and rich livery of green and gold, in which, like other court ladies, she meant to attire her chief bard: beside, his one tune was so simple and so monotonous that, though it might draw tears from Mabel and Humphry Lack-

ington at Pontefract, it would make ladies and knights laugh who were accustomed to madrigals and roundelays. Lloyd therefore received an ample largess, and was safely sent back to his own country; but in his stead the lady retained, beside the chief minstrel, (an eminent troubadour, recommended by the Queen,) three trumpeters, a tabourer, a lutist, and a player on the rebeck. Lancaster counted over the number seven on the musical list. He tolerated state; he considered that a prince of the blood ought to encourage talent, and keep a noble establishment; but he thought seven musicians, who had no other employment, must very amply supply every purpose of liberality and harmony.

A set of stage-players was next upon the list; but here Alicia professed to be very moderate. Her company was to be less, by a third, than the Queen's, and she only wished to retain them in her

service from Allhallows to Shrovetide, and from Easter to Whitsuntide. At other times they might travel and collect contributions among the nobility. Lord Lancaster doubted the expediency of partially employing men who must, at other seasons, be itinerants, especially when the state was in extreme need of soldiers, husbandmen, and artificers. But then these people were brought up to no other employ, they were selected with especial attention to their morals and abilities, and had covenanted to confine their exhibitions to mysteries and moralities, except on holidays, when some pleasant interlude, representing the burning of a castle, or the disenchanting a fair lady who had been transformed into a serpent for pride and cruelty, were permitted by all except by the most rigid devotees. The Earl nodded his assent, and the stage-players were entered on his household book.

A dwarf came next, a most diverting inoffensive creature, procured with the greatest difficulty, and less, by an inch, than the Queen's. Lord Lancaster asked his use, and said that his mother had no such appendage. Perhaps not. She might dislike the fashion, and yet it was very general. Even the Princess Margaret of Gloucester, unhappy lady! though all the world knew that her husband was proverbially disobliging, morose, and negligent, had a little antic of this description, quite a curiosity for ugliness and deformity, who rode on a tall hobby, armed cap-a-pee with a sword of lath and shield of rushes, pretending to be her knight and champion, ready to shed his blood in her defence. Many of the court ladies kept pairs of dwarfs, and supplied their friends with the unadulterated succession of that choice variety of the human species, from their nurseries; but she only wished for one dwarf to carry her

Icelandic lap-dog on a cloth of gold cushion. "Dwarf — Icelandic dog — cloth of gold cushion!" It seemed as if the blood of the Plantagenets would not endure much more; for the Earl bit his lips as he ordered his clerk to note them all down.

The next retainer was a juggler. His, Alicia owned, was but a contemptible amusement; but her damsels were irresistibly importunate to be allowed one, and she consented, as a compromise to get rid of their desire to have a soothsayer. The Earl rose from his chair of state, and closed the book, observing, he would not permit a trader in forbidden arts in his family. Alicia joined in reprobating spells, incantations, conjurations, and all unlawful means of compelling the stars to shed benign influence, or to foretel events by disturbing the peaceful dead, and then, with a smile, observed, she had now only to name the

especial attendants on her person. Besides embroiderers, tailors, the corset-maker, and tire-maker, the keeper of her wardrobe, and the burnisher of her jewels, she must have a compounder of cosmetics, a distiller of sweet waters, and a skillful leech, adroit in the science of fabricating and tempering medicated baths.

The Earl dismissed his secretary, and, turning on his Countess a more austere look than any he had ever worn since their marriage, gravely repeated the list she had just enumerated. Alicia answered, that she believed some of these retainers were newly imported luxuries: as to cosmetics, she never used them, nor did her health require medicated baths; but the Queen told her she must have them, if not for use, yet for state, to encourage ingenious people, and to appear as splendid and liberal as the rest of the blood royal.

LIBRARY

Lancaster answered, that nature was simple but grand in all her embellishments; while her bold impugners, (for so he called them,) by the minuteness of their petty contrivances, amused the fancy but chilled the affections. He pointed to two pictures in the apartment where they sat, Magdalen wiping the feet of her Lord, and Catharine awaiting martyrdom. "Can imagination," said he, "conceive two forms more exquisite, the one breathing the love of a forgiven penitent, the other, the raptures of a soul expecting instant beatitude? Has the painter implied that these holy women owe any portion of their attractions to the compounder of cosmetics, or the maker of tires and corsets? Observe the simple elegance of Magdalen's robe, the easy fall and graceful bend of her redundant tresses, how they twine round her finger as she applies them to the sacred foot,

which, with the other hand, she clasps to her contrite bosom. Now turn to the martyr. The broken rack lies near, which the heavenly guardian, hovering in the air, who waits to bear her pure spirit to paradise, has just destroyed, to evince his divine power, and consummate the guilt of persecuting Maxentius. The saint discovers no joy at the miracle which has saved her from torture, no fear of the unsheathed sword which the executioner holds over her head, while, with rude hand, he rolls up her locks, like a golden coronet, round her brows, baring her neck for the deadly blow. The eyes of the expectant martyr are fixed on heaven. She has no remaining affections for that earth which seems scarcely pressed by her feet, so visibly does devotion raise and attenuate her almost etherial form. Save the chaste fear of exposure, marked by her grasping her robe on her bosom,

her soul seems to have forgotten that it is yet in the body. Yet, how lovely is that form, how just its proportions! Can the luxurious fascinations of the Queen you so much admire and so closely imitate, or even your own still unadulterated beauty, compare with its symmetry? Yet its attire is a tunic, a mantle, a veil, and a wimple; instead of a stomacher, stiff with gems, the cincture of the unobtrusive girdle is only marked by the depending rosary, and the compression of the tunic. Imitate the dress of these pictures if you would be thought attractive; if beautiful, study their character. It is the sentiment of devotion impressed on those faces, which bestows their soul-subduing charm. Let piety then be your daily cosmetic, wash your face every morning with the tears of Magdalen, paint it with the holy glow of Catherine, and rather than encourage your fellow creatures to waste their time

and talents on arts of seduction which you profess to despise, employ the wealth you possess in being the patroness of useful inventions, and teach the princesses you are called to imitate, a more honourable ambition."

This was new language to Alicia, somewhat ungallant from a bridegroom, and rather indicative of the sternness which Beatrice prognosticated. Yet he was so discriminating (for the compliment he had paid her at the Queen's expence was not overlooked,) that she would attribute his want of taste to the singularity of his education. His mother must be an odd character. She was glad she was not to reside with one who would have been a very Father Ambrose, except that she could not be ordered to her dormitory, when she grew very troublesome.

Though most anxious not to offend, she yet ventured on an expostulation.

People might be very good without aiming to imitate saints and martyrs; and, in indifferent things, conformity to a prevailing custom implied courtesy, as much as singularity did pride. To divert unseasonable gravity, she rallied Lancaster on the dress of his mother's ward, Matilda, and revenged his reproving glance at her peaked shoes and turret-built coiffure, by supposing the rural maid still wore the Saxon sandal, snood, and bodkin. She would sketch her portrait to divert the Queen, and make her send for the original.

"My royal mother," resumed Lancaster, "preserves, in her court, the habits and manners of her sister, Queen Eleanor of Castile, whose connubial faith and decorous virtues charmed the heart of that King, who, administering justice in his plain gaberdine, asked a richly attired priest, if God was a regarder of splendid habits. Himself an

example to his subjects by his noble simplicity, he pointed out the attire as well as the virtues of his lamented consort, to the imitation of unborn ages, by the structures he erected wherever her revered remains rested in their way to the mausoleum of the Kings of England. At these crosses Edward called on his subjects to pray for the speedy beatitude of his constant companion, the endeared associate of all his dangers and glories; she whose fortitude never shrunk from peril, whether it wore the shape of an assassinating dervise, of a Pagan soldan, or a prince, falsely calling himself most christian, who basely endeavoured to plunder the hero whom he had deserted. By sea, by land, wherever Edward fought, toiled, conquered, or suffered, Eleanora, like the angel of consolation, ministered to his wants. And even the incensed elements seemed to respect their inseparable attachment, for the thunderbolt

which fell at their feet as they sat fondly conversing at Bourdeaux, spared their sacred lives, that they might a little longer shew to an admiring world a great prince, proud of being faithful to a princess who despised all meretricious arts, and preserved her husband's heart, by simplicity, chastity, and obedience. As often as you see the sculptured figure of Eleanora, pay homage to its matronly graces, respect the accomplished native of a distant clime, who left the bright sun of her own country and gave her heart to England, and an example, eminent even in a country most fertile in domestic virtues. Some of her daughters, by their high alliances, have filled foreign courts with her praises; the Countesses of Gloucester and Hereford lived examples to our own; and the pious nun at Amesbury, continues an intercessive saint, to supplicate that the full vial of heaven's vengeance may not

be poured on the degenerate nation, which has forgot the example of her parents. The royal Eleanora was not a saint or a martyr; I may therefore propose her as a fit object of your virtuous emulation. She was the friend of my illustrious mother, and the model by which the manners and mind of Matilda were fashioned."

CHAP. XIV.

Domestic happiness, thou only bliss
Of Paradise, that has surviv'd the fall;
Tho' few now taste thee unimpaired and pure,
Or tasting, long enjoy thee! too infirm,
Or too incautious to preserve thy sweets
Unmix'd with drops of bitter.

COWPER.

WE must now return to the situation of public affairs. It has been seen that the Queen's wrongs erected a third party, some of whom were stimulated by the gallant spirit of chivalry, while others were urged on by emotions less pure, and audacious hopes inspired by the condescension and confidence of injured royalty, seeking protection from an inferior. Elated by the number of partisans, whom her smiles and tears had collected and precipitated by their

rash counsels, this high-spirited princess nourished a deep and deadly resentment against her husband. As her years increased and her beauty ripened, her passions gathered strength, and the dark traits of her character became visible. She was no longer the weeping, trembling child, easily irritated and soon appeased; but the daring intriguer, determined to employ against her enemies, not only those means of defence which prudence suggests and honour justifies, but every stratagem which promised to procure their destruction; careless how far it might tend to embroil the state, or what danger and odium it brought on one whose interests reflection ought to have told her were inseparably connected with her own. She hoped to prevail on the Earl of Lancaster to become her partizan. Besides being the first subject of the realm, he was venerated as the moderator of the differences between the King and

his barons, to whose steadiness it was chiefly owing, that the parliament was kept firm to the terms of the convention at Wallingford, compelling the King, though with every sign of weak reluctance and undiminished regard, to dismiss Gaveston to his Guienne appointment. Lancaster's high character was so universally appreciated, that whatever cause he espoused, rectitude and respectability seemed allied to his determination. As Isabella's sagacity led her to discover the superiority of these qualities to those of the witlings by whom he was scoffed at, she checked the ridicule of her frivolous attendants, and treated him with a winning deference which might have caught a less guarded heart in the toils of dangerous beauty. But though disposed to shew the wife of his sovereign all those distinctions which knighthood imposed, its decorous spirit, joined to the restraints of influential piety, made him

look on the Queen as a woman whose dangerous beauty and unfortunate situation, required a greater share of prudence and forbearance than she possessed. Too discriminative to confound the suavity of highly polished manners, acquired in the most refined of European courts, with that inbred gentleness, whose meek dejection seems rather to fear its own unworthiness, than to excite vengeance for its wrongs,—he saw in the unhappily wedded Margaret of Gloucester, an object far more likely to touch his heart, though her dim eyes cast no lustre on a cheek destitute of the rose of beauty, and not one irresistible grace sported in her tresses or floated in her timid air. While Isabella, quick at discovering insults, and detecting folly, shewed by her eye and gesture, even when her tongue was silent, that she despised the unworthy prince by whom she was neglected; the wife of Gaveston

evinced, by all her actions and looks, the devotion of genuine love, unextinguished by the most cruel wrongs. If she had a delight, it was to hear him commended; and if, in the cruel shipwreck of her happiness, she retained a fear, it was that her brother or any of her kindred should seek to avenge her wretchedness. On her Lancaster had often gazed, while she, heart-broken, yet faintly smiling, stood by the side of a man from whom she had received the most galling reproach, affecting an air of cordiality and happiness; endeavouring, by the courtesy of her manners, to soften the offensive freedom of his; and concealing the sacrifices she had made to the wantonness of his waste, by placing her scanted retinue and mean appearance to the account of choice rather than necessity. As Lancaster viewed the martyr-like sufferings of this lady, he saw not the Queen; and only the

measureless content which beamed in the smiles of his Alicia, could persuade him to think even her more attractive. Perceiving that the power of this young beauty was not diminished by marriage, the Queen endeavoured to employ her blandishments to induce the Earl of Lancaster to declare himself of her party. The friendship which she had felt for De Lacy's daughter was limited to the common acceptation of that commodious term. She liked her as the most lively and agreeable of her attendants, as having invention to contrive pleasant amusements, and talents to enliven conversation and dissipate chagrin; as one who had entered into her wrongs and mortifications with the impetuosity incident to lively sensibility, while her wit enabled her either to ridicule the King or mortify his favourite. It was for these reasons Isabella declared she could not live without her dearest Lady Lancaster. But

when she saw her a beloved wife, and even often capable of influencing the superior judgment of her husband, instead of endeavouring to improve her own less happy lot, the contrast of their situations gradually changed the light preference of convenience into indifference, hatred, and malignant envy, still concealed under that gay amenity of manner which in this Princess united an angel's sweetness with a murderer's heart.

While she had hopes to render Alicia a decoy to ensnare Lancaster, the Queen shewed no abatement in her exterior marks of friendship. "You are happy," she would say to her; "the first man in England lives for you alone; and felicity has its usual effect on your memory: you forget your afflicted friend."

The young Countess vehemently repelled the accusation.

"Then," said the Queen, "am I to

believe that your influence is exerted in vain to render him less unjust to me? Do you ever tell him, that his praise is my darling theme? Why, then, on his part that cold courtesy, and those reproving looks, which indicate abhorrence? I would regard him as my dearest friend; I would entrust him with my most treasured secrets: he should be my counsellor, my monitor, my champion; but he shuns my proffered grace, and evades my supplicatory pursuit. Is it from his devotedness to his unworthy kinsman? I flatter myself, my soul is more congenial to the high-minded Lancaster, and my understanding better capable of being enlightened by his wisdom."

At a time when the Queen's vehement resentments of the King's behaviour had produced a temporary separation, Alicia repeated this complaint to the Earl of Lancaster.

"On what services," said he, "would

she employ me? Tender to her Grace my humble duty, and say I am ready to mediate between her and the King, and would gladly bear from her a submissive proposal of conciliation."

"Submission!" replied Alicia, "to a contemptible debauchee, who, absorbed in the grossest indulgencies, neglects and misuses the fairest princess in christendom? No; the message she would send would be defiance!"

Lancaster threw a reproving look on his consort, and bade her sketch the attitude of a defying lady. Recollecting herself instantly, with arch vivacity, she snatched his sword; but as she tried to wave it in mimick menace, the weighty fauchion twisted in her grasp: she dropped her sprained arm, while pain compelled the starting tear.

"Alas!" said Lancaster, "that imbecility should desert its own weapons: the tear has conquered, where the de-

fiance failed. I will attend the Queen, and hear the secret with which I only, of all the courtiers, have not been favoured from her own lips, but which my simplicity has, nevertheless, discovered, namely, that she is a bad wife to a bad husband.

When Lancaster waited on Isabella, her studied preparation for receiving him, shewed that she meant to work upon his feelings. Her dress was artfully negligent, her hair disordered, her cheek wet with tears, and the infant prince reclined upon her bosom. The future hero of Cressy slept, unconscious of those high destinies by which he was designed to revenge his mother's crimes on the country that gave her birth. She seemed to regard the child with the fondest maternal tenderness, but her eye watched the effect of her caresses on the Earl, and thus proved

that they were not the genuine impulses of nature.

"Illustrious and right worthy Prince," said she, "it suits well with your accustomed goodness to visit the orphan and widow in their affliction!"

The Earl kissed his crucifix with fervour. "May the blessed Son of Mary," said he, "and all the holy saints long keep that implied calamity from Your Highness, and from England."

"Shew us," returned the Queen, "the difference between a deserted wife and a widow: and unless you come here as the King's advocate, we will convince you that supremacy in wretchedness is the painful pre-eminence the former may claim, in such greater proportion as the perverse malignity of Satan inflicts more stripes than the fatherly chastening of Heaven."

"But the grave," answered the Earl, "is mute and deaf; no supplications

can unlock its inexorable door, and its prisoners can speak neither of forgiveness nor hope. Yet, like the white alb of baptism, the shroud has a purifying effect on our remembrance, hallowing those it enfolds. Hard and relentless must they be who can draw aside its curtain to glut the eye with the awful sight of human infirmity, gone to attend its final audit, incapable alike of vindicating or reforming its actions. Proud and incorrigible must be that heart which, when standing by the grave of an enemy, does not change reproach into self-accusation, and the memory of past injuries into contrite prayers for forgiveness. As to the office you assign me, of being the King's advocate, gracious Lady, when truth does not permit loyalty to be eloquent, it can yet be silent."

"Noble Lancaster," replied the Queen, "you then admit that the injuries of Isabella have been beyond suf-

ferance. I came to England in my childhood, the darling daughter of a powerful king. I came like the peace, of which I was the pledge, fair in form, and breathing good will to all I saw. But as my understanding ripened, my dream of happiness fled away. The pursuits of the vulgar, and the society of the vicious engrossed my husband: his heart, his time, his solicitude, were all devoted to pleasures in which I could not join, to conversations whose buffoonery offended taste, whose grossness violated delicacy. My espoused protector abandoned me to the malignity of those whose influence I sought to counteract; and he made their enmity the more acute, by being the first to hold me out to contumely. I was a sovereign queen, and yet restricted in all my actions; a youthful beauty, and neglected. Even when the existence of the heir of your crown depended on my life, the King left me

exposed to real peril, to escort to the sea his Gascon parasite, the companion of his intemperate orgies. Yes, royal boy, a jester was dearer to thy unnatural father than the lily that France placed in his bosom, or the illustrious line of Plantagenet, of which thou art the treasured germ. But the hour of endurance is succeeded by that of vengeance. I have written to my father; I have stated my wrongs, and invoked his aid. It will, doubt not, be prompt as my desires. Start not, my Lord of Lancaster, the interests of this child shall make me guard the integrity of the crown of England; and that its tarnished lustre may resume the brightness it boasted in the days of Edward the Great, even for that especial purpose, I would place its guardianship in your hands, that it may be preserved for this your young monarch, who shall owe it to your prowess, and be schooled to wear it royally, by your wisdom."

Lancaster's heart sunk within him, as he listened to the Queen's rash designs. He smote his breast with energy. "Gracious Mary," said he, "why have I lived to see this hour, when I must either accuse my Queen of high treason, or see the realm of England trodden under foot by invading Frenchmen, and infuriate insurgents, because the King and his consort cannot imitate the wisdom of the cottage pair, who finding the yoke could not be taken from their shoulders, agreed to endure it, and did so, till they found it so pleasant, that, 'tis said, the survivor died of grief for his lost partner."

"Come," continued he, lifting the babe from the lap of Isabella, "come, most dear descendant of a long line of princes, and plead with me to your royal parents, forbidding them to throw away a kingdom's welfare, and their own content. Speak of the con-

nubial felicity of your grandsire, — that theme of Europe's admiration. Say, also, how kindly the hand of Eleanora of Provence weeded the thorns that rankled in the crown of Henry of Winchester. The nation rose in rebellion, but she was faithful. He was imprisoned, wounded, insulted, but she shared his fortunes; and when, at last, the misguided prince sought that peace in the grave which the earth denied, tell thy mother that his faithful widow, though still in the prime of her days, renounced the world, as a joyless void, and spent twenty years in contemplative seclusion, praying for the peace of her husband's soul. History records her Henry as weak and negligent, an infant in policy, charmed by the baubles of royalty, a syphon, skilfully played by the papacy, to divert the stream of English opulence into Saint Peter's patrimony. But in her eyes he

was great and magnanimous; for true love is a potent enchanter, and can create a peopled city in the wastes of Zaarah."

The Queen listened to this tender yet forcible appeal, but it was with increased envy of Alicia, not with subdued disgust of the King. She pleaded, that she was the victim of state-policy, not like the princesses he alluded to, the choice of affection. She admitted, that her husband never possessed her regard, and asked why she should bestow what was neither wooed for, nor valued. She lamented that though born with exquisite sensibility, her heart must be a stranger to the soft affections. Love, she said, would have created patience.

"O rather," answered Lancaster, "let patience create love. Shall the world say, Your Highness found it more difficult to subdue irritability than other princely sufferers have done to heal, or

rather to hide the wounds of tenderness. O respect the motives of a faithful subject, if zeal urges me to discourteous boldness. Try, I beseech you, if our too yielding sovereign is obdurate only to you. Let me place this sweet minister of conciliation in the arms of his father, to tell him that his mother weeps, weeps secretly and sincerely. Blessed be Your Majesty! those gracious tears justify my presumption. If he returns that answer which my confidence in his inborn royalty warrants, I will myself set off for France, bearing your signet in pledge of my veracity, and remind your father of the fate of those who interfere in domestic feuds; conjuring him not to think so meanly of his daughter, as that she would consume our land with firebrands, when she has brought forth a prince to govern us. I will tell him, too, that your present happiness wants but one addition, namely,

that he should forget you ever believed yourself wretched."

"But," said the Queen, "if your suit should fail?"

"I would still go to France," answered the Earl, "and trusting that I am the only person to whom your Highness has entrusted the rash step you have taken, I would entreat King Philip not to add to your remorse, by acting upon a repented desire."

"And would *you* then become my avenger, and the guardian of my child?" inquired Isabella.

"Not since Your Grace has power to engage a wiser avenger, and a more powerful guardian," replied the Earl, "even the King of Kings, to whom princes are subject; on earth, to his written word,—hereafter, to his tribunal. For my own part, I will not be the guardian of a minor prince, but the faithful executor of the wise measures of a

potent sovereign. Royal Lady, I must bear the Prince to the King, not as a rival come to dispute his crown, but to remove the misconceptions which those, most of all, must lament, who, unhappily, persuade themselves resentment is easier than reconciliation."

"Go, persuasive Lancaster," said the Queen, "but beware of committing my cause by undue concessions. In all our contentions I cannot recollect one instance in which not only the first provocation, but the acrimony of the dispute did not proceed from the King." The Earl smiled at this instance of feminine tenacity, and observed, that a visit from His Majesty would probably prove refreshing to her memory, or at least convince her, that they who were most apt to offend, were also most expert at conciliation.

"Stay," said the Queen, while a smile and a blush gave the consummate charm to her beauty: "I have the curiosity

to know if when you dispute with Alicia you are always victorious, or is it my unaptness at argument that makes me so easily defeated?"

"We never dispute," replied Lancaster.

"Never dispute," said she, and the roseate glow gave way to the pale hue of envy. She added, "but your loves are at present young;" and recollecting herself, proceeded in a dignified accent, "To you, my Lord, we intrust the Prince, and we shall expect you safely to restore him to our own care."

"The gracious inclinations of the King will re-unite himself to his wife and his son," answered he; "but as in three days I hope to breathe the air of your native France, what pledge shall I bear from Your Grace to prove the confidence with which I am honoured?"

The Queen was tempted to send her ring of espousals, as a reproach to her father for having bestowed her on an un-

worthy partner; but fearing to provoke a stern rebuke from that virtue which she at once dreaded and admired, she gave him a broach bearing her device, a lily formed of pearls, encircled by a zone of emeralds.

"Bear my fond greetings to fair France," said she, with recollections that revived better feelings. "Many a cloudy day has been my lot since my father bore his happy girl from the banks of the Seine to the Garonne, while the mild sun of winter illumined the clear sky of Gascony, to grace my espousals. Four kings stood at the high altar; three queens encouraged me with their smiles, while I received and kissed the consecrated pall. All that was beautiful, noble and brave, crowded the cathedral. I looked up timidly to the man for whom I had renounced country, kindred, and friends. He was in the morn of youth; so benign was his aspect, so graceful his figure,

that I scarce sighed over the sacrifice I had made. I had often heard the English called the lords of human kind, and I supposed a Princess could never want a friend among that generous nation."

"Let Your Grace discard the unseemly humility which makes you suppose yourself friendless," answered the Earl of Lancaster; "for our domestic troubles rarely require active interference, or more potent remedies than those assuasives our own prudence may furnish. At least forbear to call those friends who would persuade you to forget that, pledged as you are to England and to its King, your glory and happiness are inseparable from theirs."

The Earl of Lancaster conveyed the young prince to Eltham, whither the King had moodily retired, and requested an audience in the name of his first subject, who came to complain of a grievance which His Majesty only could redress.

Surrounded by those base spirits who founded their importance on separating the pliant, indolent prince from his truest friends, and in fomenting the royal broils, this message was easily interpreted into a presumptuous arrogation of importance. But the house of Lancaster stood too near the throne for its head to be treated with disrespect; and when he appeared with his future King in his arms, his accusers shrunk confounded, the heart of Edward melted, and, receiving his child from his faithful friend, he inquired, "What would our noble cousin?"

"Your private ear, Sire," said Lancaster, and the courtiers withdrew.

Clouded as were the King's intellects, by a long course of inactivity and indulgence, he felt ashamed of being surprized in his luxurious retreat; and surmising the intended request, determined to prevent the complaints he anticipated, by stating his own. He thanked the Earl

for taking the Prince from the Queen, admired the child's improvement, and lamented the imperious spirit of Isabella, who had reproved him with so much insolence as to induce the necessity of separation. Lancaster listened in silence, which the King interpreted in his own favour, and proceeded to narrate a plot of the Queen's, which his emissaries had just discovered, to escape with the child into France, and excite her father to invade England, to prevent which he had also determined to put her under an arrest, and place a guard on her conduct.

The Earl of Lancaster had studied human nature, and knew, that as fame and self-applause influence lofty minds, so fear and interest are the means of acting on base spirits. He therefore answered that he came in behalf of the young Prince, to lay before the King the condition of a kingdom which he would one day require at his hands in the same

flourishing state he had himself received it. The wisdom and energy of the parliament and the council had indeed repaired many wrongs; but, he grieved to add, the credit as well as the labour was solely theirs. They had raised an army, and sent it into the north, under the command of the Earl of Gloucester; but accustomed to the presence of their sovereign, the dispirited soldiers asked why they were led by the grandson instead of the son of the conqueror of Scotland. Should it be acknowledged that he was guarding his summer-palace, or waging war with his Queen, or that he was occupied with the tilt-yard and the tennis-court? Though, by the dismissal of many exacting ministers, and prodigal favourites, the people would be less oppressed by taxes, and harassed by vexatious services, they would also be more dangerously employed than while struggling for the means of existence.

The times of complete ignorance and passive submission were now passed by. The fostering hand of the late King had raised the toiling multitude to such importance, that they now freely canvassed the conduct of their superiors. Royalty had unhappily and most unwisely made them the umpire of its dissensions; and thus furnished a jest for the vulgar, an excuse for the factious, discord for the present times, and a warning for the future. Instead of bending to grave authority, and finding ease and happiness in obedience, villains and artizans were adopting badges of distinction, calling themselves kings-men and queens-men, and doubting if they were not released from their allegiance to a prince who did not rule his own household with discretion. "Those disputes," continued he, "which, whenever they occur, should be kept concealed from profane gazers, are proclaimed at market-

crosses, and occupy the thoughts of England; while France menaces your maternal inheritance, Scotland encamps on your northern border; and Wales, repairing her mountain-fortresses, threatens the archers of the valley with the renewed toils of conquest. Unhappy England, sunk like thy fortunes, hast thou no better theme to exercise thy intellects than such bickerings as supply topics for the village-gossip? Where are the glorious subjects which Palestine or Lochaber once afforded? Impertinent canvassers of fabricated whispers, instead of grave discussers of legislation and war, will a nation of eavesdroppers be worthy of the rule of that representative of thirty English Kings whom the Prince you vilify now clasps to his aching heart?"

"My Lord of Lancaster," said the King, "you speak as if our inclinations were a party to this change, instead of their being, as is truly the case, most

sorely grieved at whatever impugns the happiness or the honour of our subjects. It is our misfortune to reign in disorderly times, when the nation, intoxicated by a long series of glory and prosperity, cannot soberly endure that change of state to which kingdoms as well as private men are subject. Must we repeat, that it is our study, our wish and our prayer, that these dominions may be prosperous, and all our people happy?"

"My Liege," returned Lancaster, "when I last addressed Your Grace, you doubted the truth of my faithful statement; yet the cry of discontent was not only whispered in closets, but proclaimed on turrets; and the amelioration which has since taken place is referred to those who, as loyal subjects, regret the reputation which they have purloined from their sovereign. Yet is the case not wholly desperate. The English, though an irritable, are an honest nation. They feel

that the reputation of their monarch is their own; and if his vices offend their honour, their pride leads them to glory in his virtues. Give faction and insubordination no topic on which to declaim. Supply loyalty and affection with themes bright and happy as the inspiration which they delight to feel. Burst from this retirement, which is only fit for a King of the Sybarites; call on all your faithful barons to follow you; appoint your headquarters at York, and send from thence your defiance to Scotland."

"And leave the Queen in London, to ripen her machinations in a turbulent city where she has gained so many confederates?"

"No, take her with you. Do not offend her high spirit by constraint, nor compel her to be a traitress, by appearing to suspect her conduct. Yet still employ some highly trusted person, who shall so carefully superintend her conduct that it

shall be utterly impossible for her to rob England of the Prince, or to excite a spirit of discontent in your army."

The King answered, that he had formed too slight an apprehension of the contrivances of a woman who would elude the hundred eyes of Argus. He then asked Lancaster whom he could select for this important post of superintendant of the Queen's conduct.

"Yourself," replied the Earl; "your renewed affections acting on her revived sense of duty, will be her best guardian. It is rare to find a female heart so insensible to love and gratitude, that it cannot be improved by attention and confidence. Lift thy beseeching hands, illustrious babe, to Him who for our sakes once wore the form of helpless innocence. Supplicate him to restore amity to thy royal parents; so shall the true friends of England cease to fear the ravages of that flame which domestic discord threatens.

My Liege, you press your child to your bosom; extend the embrace also to its mother, and thus transform the fire-brand of Ate into the olive of peace."

The King hesitated, and like many more indignant husbands, felt almost ashamed to particularise the grievances, which, when accumulated, appeared intolerable. His friends, he said, had not been treated with due consideration; his temper was not studied; and instead of permitting her favour to follow the guidance of his choice, by an inverted rule the Queen regularly preferred his enemies. Lancaster asked if such provocations should weigh against a kingdom's peace, and forcibly stated the public obligations of royalty, which, as a counterpoise to many peculiar distinctions, imposed an imperious restraint on the appetites and passions of the conservator of national greatness. He contrasted the benign influence of connubial happiness, as enjoyed

by his father, with the miseries that befel England even under the reign of a wise and gallant Prince, from the contentions of Henry Fitz-empress with Eleanora of Guienne, when four sons, taking part in the quarrel of their parents, successively rose in rebellion against their father. The fruits of this contest were an imprisoned queen, a nation degraded by the forced submission of its sovereign to the papal yoke, and a high-spirited king dying in the prime of his age of a broken heart, cursing, with his latest breath, his disloyal wife and viperous issue. Reluctantly yielding to his better convictions, or his awakened fears, Edward objected only to such concessions as would compromise his dignity by appearing to acknowledge his errors. But Lancaster replied, that when there was a large field for recrimination, the most abrupt way of settling a dispute was the happiest. He proposed that the King should return with the young prince to

Westminster, thank the Queen for gratifying him with a sight of his son, and invite her to spend the Christmas with him at York. The winter months would allow him leisure to renew his acquaintance with martial exercises and military men; new scenes and characters would suggest interesting topics of conversation, and divert their minds to useful occupations, from painful and useless recollections. The new year would open with the happiest auspices; and by the time the forces could take the field, the King would be armed in the impenetrable mail of his subjects' affections, and braced for the hour of peril with the comfort afforded by his domestic relations. With the fluctuating weakness of a judgment too easily influenced to adhere to any purpose, the King yielded to a plan which at least promised a journey, a holiday, and a temporary relief from his difficulties. He set out for London; and the Earl of

Lancaster, relying on his promise to restore the Prince, and be reconciled to the Queen, proceeded to Paris, on the harder task of persuading Philip the Fair to forget the complaints of his daughter, renounce his alliance with Robert Bruce, and forego, in respect to the interests of his infant grandson, his views on those rich provinces in the south-west of France, which, by inheritance, or by the marriage of its sovereigns, were now vested in the crown of England.

CHAP. XV.

"Woman possesses an invincible fortitude against pain, but is liable to be seduced by pleasure.

CHATEAUBRIAND.

THE minds of the King and Queen had been too much alienated, and their relish of pure domestic affection and quiet cordiality was so vitiated by a keen avidity for debasing pleasures on one side, and by intriguing ambition and vindictive pride on the other, for them to feel any sincere or durable joy at their ostensible reconciliation, or gratitude to the friend who had acted as a peace-maker. Their respective partizans, indignant at the apparent diminution of their own consequence, agreed in one point, namely, malignity to the man whose interference suspended their petty views. His absence

from court enabled them to set the engines of detraction to work; and the royal pair were individually persuaded to believe the Earl of Lancaster unjust and partial. The King, in particular, was induced to think his sudden disappearance from court was worse than enigmatical. Why did he not stay to consolidate the reconciliation which he appeared to think so important? Was he afraid the King should discover, by his stolen glances at the Queen, that he was aware of the services he had rendered Her Majesty, and knew how to estimate them? Where was he gone without a passport? The Countess of Lancaster, when questioned, ingenuously answered she did not know. He had stopped with her but a moment, to give her some counsel relative to her conduct; and in answer to her enquiries, only stated that he was bound on important business, and could not predict the period of his absence. Alicia owned,

that she had wept so much at this their first separation, that she forgot to urge him to be explicit.

It was soon discovered that he had embarked for Boulogne. He had large possessions in the Low Countries in right of his mother; but if the conservation of Beaufort and its demesnes required his presence, he needed not have scrupled giving that reason for his journey. Was it not probable that he was the Queen's agent, gone to the French court for the purpose of fomenting the strife he seemed to deprecate, and to ripen the conspiracy he would not allow to be crushed, by the most decisive methods of removing the Prince, and setting a guard over the Queen? Thus did the Earl's careful concealment of Isabella's rashness operate on the King, creating a suspicion that he was a partner in the guilt he endeavoured to counteract; a conclusion which that unfortunate sovereign was more prone to

draw, from envy of his superior qualities, and resentment of the freedom of his rebukes. The Queen was swayed by different passions. Bound by an indissoluble tie to one from whom her heart revolted with contempt, but not yet reconciled to the guilt and degradation of personal infidelity, her eye wandered among the nobles of the court of England, alternately preferring one to the other, and all of them to her husband. The manners of the age permitted a peculiarity of attention, and a devotedness of affection, without swerving into criminal intercourse; and Isabella was solicitous to engage the Earl of Lancaster as her devoted knight; an honour for which, beside many other less notorious competitors, the young Earl of Mortimer passionately sighed. But whether from discovering those latent traits in the Queen's character, which proved her unfitness to become the chaste mistress of chivalry; or

whether judging this heroical coquetry to be incompatible with his own reputation, either as a husband or as a censor, who wished to raise the standard of manners, and render it better suited to the times, it was only to divert that quick irritability of feeling, which the King's or Gaveston's behaviour often excited, that Lancaster had ever deviated from that grave respect which the Queen demanded, into those attentive gallantries that would gratify the woman.

Mortified at a manner thus correctly cold, and not content to receive friendly services from one whom she wished should feel the power of her charms, the Queen ruminated on the cause of this indifference. Her mirror told her it could not be want of radiance in her eyes, or fascination in her smiles; it must be the power of Alicia's beauty. This fair rustic, whom she had summoned to her court to vanquish those for whom she did not

deign to spread her own toils, had not only bound Lancaster in the hymeneal fetters, but, as a modern intriguer would say, spoiled him for a cecisbeo and a pretty fellow, which perhaps admiration of an highly accomplished Queen might have made him. Though decidedly the loveliest of English ladies, consummate judges agreed that the Countess of Lancaster could not vie with her in form and feature; and as to graceful manners and accomplishments, there could be no competition; it must therefore be the real or supposed existence of moral qualities or gratitude for the exclusive preference which Alicia had so frankly avowed. To try the stability of those virtues and that affection was the return the Queen determined to make for Lancaster's zeal to reconcile her to her husband, and prevent the mischief which her rash appeal to her father threatened to the interests of her son. Thus, with the common fate

of honest mediators, the Earl of Lancaster was condemned by both parties for not betraying their interests to their acrimony.

Corroborating the views of Isabella, but independent of her councils, the Earl of Surrey thought Lancaster's absence afforded him a fair opportunity of giving efficiency to that spirit of interminable revenge which he concealed in his bosom, against the man who had dared to espouse his contracted bride, in studied defiance of his interdicting menace. Persuaded that it was impossible Lancaster would assert any claim to Alicia, building on the workings of an independent spirit in his own favour, which, though it would resist a positive demand, must, he thought, be won by an act of generosity; and being also a willing dupe to that self-flattery which fondly dwelt on his own irresistible attractions, Lord Surrey risked the dangerous experiment of releasing a lady from obligations which

he trusted his liberality and merit would induce her to renew. Supplanted by a princely ascetic, who had renounced his avowed plan of life to become his rival; outwitted in his policy by a girl who had, unknown to him, excited an interest in the heart of the only man whom his threats could not intimidate, and against whose power the King could not interfere, this haughty baron saw himself caught in his own toils, and being compelled to yield, he was left with no other alternative than to do so with a grace which would facilitate his future vengeance; or, by discovering his implacable revenge, to prepare his enemies to defeat the machinations they expected. The castles of Madoc had not been obtained by his grandfather by confessing to Lady Emma Audley that avarice and enmity to the Cambrian princes induced him to court their guardianship. Master of smooth oratory, an adept in subtle de-

ceit, like all other libertines and oppressors, he had repeatedly checked the expression of those passions he harboured in his bosom, and bade the unruly desire, which he wanted principle to exterminate, wait on place, time, and convenience, till each according adjunct heightened lust to frenzy, and gave an exhilerating impulse to infernal revenge. Lancaster had robbed him of a charming woman, the richest heiress in England: it would be easy to institute a suit in the spiritual courts, to challenge him to a single combat, or to waste his lands and burn his castles. The first measure would better become a gownsman than a chieftain; and in either of the latter alternatives, his own life and fortunes were staked against his rival's; and Surrey had too much attachment to this world and its pleasures, and two little dependance on the masses he sometimes heard,

and the indulgences he purchased, to brave the future, by provoking a power greater than his own, or encountering an arm whose prowess was confessedly unequalled. If in the barbarous spirit of the age he commenced a system of predatory war, and Lancaster retaliated, would this accelerate his possession of Alicia; or would it be the surest way of torturing a man who, though he preserved great state in his equipage and retinue, submitted, from political motives, in his own personal enjoyments, to the privations of a monk or an anchorite, even while he resided in a luxurious court? To lure from him the fair prize which Lancaster had boldly snatched from his arms, or to convince him it was of no value, would be the way to sting the man to the soul: his feelings (like most people of reserved tempers and severe manners) were deep and acute; and he, unblemished in his

own reputation, required from all his connections unswerving rectitude. Women have been frail, and servants venal in all ages. The chief difficulty was to avoid exciting suspicion, which would put endangered virtue on its defence. By a manner respectful, distant, and dejected, he had in a great degree changed Alicia's opinion of his character, and convinced her of two points favourable to his views and dangerous to her principles, namely, that she had thought of him too harshly, and that he continued to be the prey of hopeless love, though respect and honour checked every intimation of his passion. Occasionally he withdrew from the court, but whenever he returned, he re-assumed the same decorous melancholy character. Beatrice assured her lady, that these frequent absences were caused by his ineffectual attempts to break the fetters her charms imposed. She did not reveal (perhaps she did not know) that his

wanton paramour, Maud of Nersford, often lured him to Sandal Castle, from whence, weary of his days of saturnalia, he returned to a pursuit in which appetite stimulated intellect.

Still he acquiesced in the murder of Prince Madoc's children. No: Beatrice insisted that there was great reason to infer his innocence. Old Lloyd might mistake, in supposing that the young Earl was privy to his grandfather's designs; or Eubulo's father might perpetrate the act from some malicious motive of his own; or the old bard, like many of his profession, might be a vagabond slanderer of nobles and princes. It was very odd, if he committed such a crime when young, that he never repeated it; and she never heard a syllable breathed against him except by Friar Ambrose and the Welsh harper. She appealed to Dorcas; and that simple, well-intentioned girl, whose melting heart always yearned for

a faithful lover, protested with tears that she quite adored the Lord Surrey, because she was sure he adored her Lady. Beatrice then hinted, that had he been her husband, he would not have left her in England, with a charge to live retired during his absence, wholly devoting herself to the government of her numerous household, and the care of her aged father, but have taken her with him, shewn her beauty to the court of France, and given her a view of its splendour. Alicia wept, owned that it was rather hard, but thought that probably her lord forgot her having often expressed a wish to see the Queen's handsome family. She would however employ herself as he directed till his return.

"But dearest lady," said Dorcas, "do not bury us in London with the Earl your father; it will be so gloomy and stupid when the court is gone to York."

"My lady cannot have such a design,"

said Beatrice; "it would mortally offend the Queen if her dearest friend, as Her Highness always calls her, were to be absent at the feasts about to be given on account of the royal reconciliation. The master of the revels has exercised all his wits to make them most proper and ingenious. Every day there is to be a new pastime. Beside tournaments and banquets, and the bearn-bishop, and slight-of-hand conjurors, and moriscoe and jingling matches, and bull-baitings, and riding at the ring, I have heard from a friend, in confidence, that there is to be a trial of skill between Provençal poets, Welsh harpers, and bards from the north country; and the Queen and her ladies are to give silver harps and golden chains to the victors. Last of all, there is to be a pageant in the Italian fashion. Did Your Grace ever see a pageant? They say it is the finest sight in the world. There are to be eight triumphs: the first is to be

that of Love, who is to ride on a chariot drawn by lions, and to be followed by all the faithful couples who have ever lived in the world, bearing pennons telling who they are, and complimenting the King and Queen."

Dorcas interrupted the description, with earnestly entreating that they might go. "If," said she, "Your Grace is afraid of our lord, you might only just stay at York for that one raree shew."

Lady Alicia frowned at Dorcas for using so unappropriate a term as fear. She certainly had a very great inclination to go. She had long wished to entertain the court at Pontefract, and shew some of the ladies, who had occasionally given themselves airs of consequence, her hereditary importance; and as this was so fair an opportunity, it was very hard she might not. Certainly her lord had not taken every contingency into his view, or considered what claims might be made

on his credit and hospitality, when he advised her (for it was only advice) to live retired during his absence.

If it were only advice, the girls argued it was not positively binding; and they entreated their lady to consult her confessor; Beatrice at the same time enlarging on the comfort of having a spiritual guide to whom they could open their hearts, instead of a morose, contracted bigot like Father Ambrose, who terrified them into duplicity.

Sir Hilary was summoned; but the Countess was predetermined to comply with the wishes of her lord, and only consulted her confessor to know what merit would be annexed to the sacrifice of her own desires. The appearance and manner of this priest better corresponded with the modern French abbé, than the secluded monk of the fourteenth century. Ambitious and indolent; studious only to preserve his importance by that smatter-

ing of learning which in the dark ages contributed to the preservation of ecclesiastical tyranny, he was a sophist rather than a philosopher, and a sensualist and pleasant companion instead of a saint. Alicia intended to confess the temptation she felt to follow her own inclinations; but Beatrice boldly put the question, whether the advice, or even the commands of an absent husband should be implicitly obeyed.

Sir Hilary assumed the air of a casuist, and rejecting Scripture or reason for guides, proceeded to obscure the case by logical definitions. Commands might be good, neutral, or bad; the obligation to obedience might be positive, conditional, or abrogated by superior claims. Advice and commands were kept distinct, or rendered conjunctive, by the disposition, situation, or even the tone and manner of the imposer. Even commands admitted of four distinctions, with respect

to the authority from whence they proceeded; for a lawful power might be exerted for a lawful or an unlawful purpose; or superiority might be usurped for a bad or a good purpose. Again, the party from whom obedience was required might be an ideot, or an infant, and in each case bound to an implicit acquiescence, by those rules which are obligatory on immature or extinguished understandings; or the principal and the agent might be equal in the capacity of determining, or even superior, or influenced by superhuman convictions. Sir Hilary argued the case in every point of view, till they despaired of his getting to the end of the multiplied changes; but at the winding up he rewarded their patience by deciding, that the intellects of the Countess of Lancaster being equal, or perhaps superior, to the Earl's; and circumstances having arisen, of which, from distance and other causes, he could not

judge; if she could say, with a safe conscience, that she believed herself called on by a sense of duty to accompany the Queen her sovereign lady to York, she might go, and he would only impose on her a slight penance, such as abstaining from eating marmalade; or were she very fond of marmalade, doubling the number of Paternosters, not because she disobeyed the Earl, but for giving him to understand she would comply with his desires.

Every member of Lady Lancaster's establishment felt persuaded that a Daniel was come to judgment, and never was a household so happy in an enlightened and liberal pastor. Alicia still doubted. It was her first marked deviation from what she felt was her duty; her first opposition to what she knew to be her husband's will. She had indeed, by her acquiescence, filled all her family with measureless content; but when she paid her

farewel visit to the Earl of Lincoln, he wrung her hand, and took leave as solemnly as if he knew it would be their final interview. Why that ominous apprehension, she inquired. Her absence she promised should be short; she would only visit Pontefract, see the pageants, and return. But De Lacy, humbled by decrepitude, and anticipating a speedy sojourn in the grave, proceeded to give directions for his funeral in her presence. He commanded that he should be interred in the cathedral church of Saint Paul, in the armour he wore in Palestine; and that his effigies, carved in the posture of a crusader, should be laid on his tomb. He required of her also that she should found a chantry of priests; and that on the anniversary of his death, and the eve of All Souls, his descendants should go in pilgrimage to his cemetery, there to offer tapers, and sprinkle holy water, to enlighten the gloom, and abate the pangs

of purgatory.. Such hold had the terrors of Romish superstition early imprinted, and perpetually inculcated, even on the strongest minds; and though, in the period of health and activity, their influence might be apparently suspended, it was only to return with invincible force in those moments, when the awful proximity of the future world absorbed all concern for the present; and anxious care, disappointed in the objects of its terrestrial pursuits, fixed with intense solicitude on that part of man's compounded being, to which it paid least attention during the time which would have best improved its condition.

The Countess wept at her father's conversation. She had promised to attend the Queen to York, and that princess had already set out, depending on having the advantage of her counsel, and the pleasure of her society. She asked her father if he wished her to re-

main with him. Struggling with a sense of neglect, which his affection and his fortitude alike made him unwilling to own, he bade her do what she felt to be her duty. "Enable me to perform it," said she, sinking on her knees, "by your blessing." He gave it with a solemn pathos, which again indicated it would be the last he should bestow.

The Lady Alicia's suite only waited the conclusion of this visit,—they were all accoutered ready to depart; and the shame of appearing wavering and fickle now assisted her inclinations for pleasure, and subdued the impulses of filial duty. Beatrice succeeded in persuading her, that a distempered dream, the effect of infirmity or indigestion, or a sound mistaken for a death-watch, or some other dubious omen, had magnified the apprehensions of gradual decay. The Earl certainly looked as well, and spoke as strong, as usual; and to pray for him at the crosses

which they passed on the road, was as much an act of filial piety as to sit and weep by his bed-side. Her ladies were unanimous in entreating her not to suffer such dolours as death and purgatory, entirely to occupy her attention; and ere they had proceeded two stages these thoughts were effectually banished, by anticipations of their splendid appearance at York, and devices for the fête at Pontefract. Costly attire, rich hangings, choice viands, and such ingenious variety as would prevent satiety, required so much deliberation, and it was so necessary to hasten rapidly after the Queen, lest they should be too late for the amusements, that the intended devotions at the way-side crosses were commuted, by a largess, to those who, having more leisure, were hired to pray for the safe return of the Earl of Lancaster, and the life of the Earl of Lincoln.

But the young volatile indulged Alicia

was not the only thoughtless worshiper of amusement, whom the prospect of a scene of dissipation seduced into a renunciation of graver duties. In the mind of Edward of Carnarvon, the ideas of pleasure and Gaveston were so combined, that it was impossible for him to welcome the first without the latter. During the sitting of parliament, and while the power of the ordainers was in full force, he had been obliged to dispense with his favourite's company; but the privation was felt with all that fond lingering after a forbidden delight, which marks a mind totally enervated by long indulgence; and a festivity without his irradiating presence was insupportable. Various were the intrigues set afloat by those who flattered the King's inclinations, at the expence of his best interests, to pave the way for Gaveston's recall. The reign of Henry the Third is well known, as the period in which the third estate began to hold a regular place

in the great council of the nation. This power was introduced as a check and equipoize to that of the clergy and the barons, and to the order they represented. Edward the First during his long salutary reign, granted many immunities tending, in their immediate effect, to increase the security of the crown, and in their prospective effect, to create that intelligence, enterprize, and fortitude in the middle classes of society, to which, with the blessing of Divine Providence, it is owing, that England has set such a glorious example to those nations, whose population, consisting of an unwieldy aristocracy, and a rabble sunk in vassalage and ignorance, have easily become the prey of tyrants.

But a wise prince will consider the difference between forming one class of his subjects into a barrier against the exorbitant power of the other, and exciting mutual hostility. By bestowing charters

on towns, allowing the nobility to alienate their lands, granting facilities to commerce, and founding schools and colleges for the education of youth, the commonalty of England had gradually loosened their feudal chains, acquired property independent of their great landlords, and exercised those powers of ratiocination and genius which, in some instances, led to equality of power. Though, generally speaking, the potent baron acted towards his dependants as a father to his children, yet as human nature had always the same propensity to prefer what the individual considers as his own interest, instances of oppression could not be infrequent, where law scarce attended to the wrongs of humble claimants. Grateful to royalty for those favours which originally emanated from the throne, the first effusions of freedom among the people gave birth to those insurrections, in which the nobility were the chief objects of hatred; and

these were repeated as often as a vigorous and prosperous administration was succeeded by misrule and misfortune. When public resources were misapplied, and profusely wasted, it was easy for those who governed England by the pernicious system of favouritism, to divert the resentment of an irritable, suffering commonalty, insufficiently informed as to the source of the miseries they endured, from the sovereign, to those same feudal chieftains at whose power they had been accustomed to tremble, and whom they were the more easily disposed to consider collectively as oppressors.

Depending on being the heir of his father's popularity, no sooner was the parliament dispersed, the power of the ordainers expired, and the Earl of Lancaster gone from court, than the King proceeded to recall Gaveston, though in so doing he violated the solemn

vows which he had taken as a knight, a Christian, and an anointed king. To excuse this perjury he sent circular letters to the sheriffs of the counties, stating that he was previously bound by his coronation-oath to see justice administered to all his subjects; and being conscious that the Earl of Cornwall had been banished by a most foul conspiracy, he had recalled him; not to screen him from his enemies, but that he might be submitted to a free and open trial. But still believing him to be innocent of the crimes laid to his charge, he should, till such trial could take place, treat him as a faithful subject; and he had summoned him to York to consult on important affairs.

Indignant at this mean prevarication, and unroyal conduct, the barons appealed to the same tribunal, the judgment of the public, which thus seemed to sit as um-

pire between claimants contending for their favour. The demon of discord was thus again let loose; the King beheld his splendour eclipsed by the departure of many of the chief barons; and the supplies intended for the Earl of Gloucester were withdrawn under frivolous pretences, by the lords of each party, who thus sought to disguise their apprehensions, that their troops would be wanted for intestine war.

Nor was the behaviour of Gaveston calculated to allay the flame which his return had re-lighted. It seemed to be the fate of this presumptuous man to neglect every warning, to grow more insolent from every chastisement, and to justify his enemies in their conclusion, that extermination was the only cure for his obdurate insolence. Perceiving, that during his absence the Queen had acquired some consequence, and had formed

a party, especially designated as her friends, he studiously shewed her the same marked contempt, which Mortimer and his associates as openly retorted. Thus the court exhibited a scene not uncommon in the residence of those princes who mistake splendour for greatness, and allow base intrigue to supplant enlarged policy; while cabal and flattery are called wisdom and attachment. There were seen at York, the greatest profusion of expence, a surfeiting routine of amusements, a gasping impatience for uninterrupted enjoyment, strained affectation of inordinate satisfaction, and equally insincere professions of eternal regard, combined with envy, hatred, discontent, and restless avidity to secure a portion of that golden shower of honours, rewards, and appointments, which, under the pretence of exciting a military spirit, the lavish King poured on his favourites; —

thus wasting the resources that the ordainers had accumulated to form the sinews of war.

In these scenes of external gaiety and real misery, the Countess of Lancaster bore a distinguished part, and amid the heart-burnings of a factious court, simply wondered, that she was not happy. Gaveston again wore her favours: to mortify him she danced with Mortimer, and allowed Surrey, who was retiring and respectful, to court her favour, by often singing the canzonet which an exiled troubadour composed in praise of her beauty, her descent, and her device.

Among the vallies of Thoulouse,
While yet a youth, I sought the rose,
The rose of Provence, 'twas to dress
My bower of nuptial happiness;
And many a pleasant lay I wove,
In honour of the rose of love.

Ah me! the vallies of Thoulouse
No more are spangled with the rose;
No more, beneath that azure sky,
For love the shepherds smile and sigh.
Flames more intense their hearts assail,
And tortur'd victims shriek and wail.

From these sad scenes, my fate to brave,
A free-born bard, but beauty's slave,
With madrigal and roundelay,
Through many a clime I took my way,
Seeking o'er mountain, dale, and grove,
The rose of beauty and of love.

The prize is found: Ah, bard unblest!
It blossoms on a rival's breast;
'Tis on his banner'd tree unfurl'd,
Branch of that rose which charm'd the world;
And still Plantagenet receives
The incense of its fragrant leaves.

Severely chaste, supremely fair,
Source of my hope, and my despair;
If to an echoing voice I pine,
May one response alone be mine:
The love I dare not now disclose
Shall murmur "Sweet Lancastrian Rose."

But, beside being the richest attired, best attended, and most admired lady, Alicia had the glory of giving the most splendid fête at Pontefract that the Queen, as she herself owned, had ever enjoyed; and all the court ladies were pining with mortification, at the grandeur of her fortress, the fancy of her tapestry, her massy plate, costly jewels, and numerous, well-appointed retainers. How very extraordinary, as well as how wondrously pitiful, that she could not again feel that free delight, that rapturous enjoyment, as when she followed her father in his sylvan sports, flew her falcon at the brown heath-cock, or on the banks of some of the rapid streams that feed the Stour, lured the spotted trout from his crystal element. Were hawking and fishing more exhilarating sports than tiltings and maskings? She never then felt wearisome cravings for untried novelties, or concealed conscious disappoint-

ment and dejection, under the mask of exuberant mirth. To the bodily fatigue which they occasioned, sleep proved a sure relief; and the fair huntress sprung from her pallet with the mounting lark, to resume her cheerful occupations; but retiring from the suffocating heat of a crowded festival, she could not sleep. The agitating hurry of the scene swam tremulously on her waving pillow; the loud symphonies of vocal and instrumental music tingled in her ears with disturbing murmurs; the glare of torches, and the splendour of cloth-of-gold mantles, jewels, and snowy plumage, danced in painful confusion before her eyes; and a night of feverish restlessness succeeded what was miscalled a day of pleasure, even when some painful incident or overheard sarcasm did not remind her, that in this crowded assemblage of the great and the proud, she had not one friend—not one who really

loved her. Not even the Queen, who so exclusively claimed that title; for she too could change the terms of "Our most dear and most lovely cousin" to a whispered jest on the home-bred wife of Lancaster, who, presuming on her wealth, desired to outshine the daughter and consort of kings.

Mean-time that wealth, which, next to her beauty, was the prime incentive to the envy she inspired, wasted fast beneath those extraordinary expenses which sumptuous apparel and entertainments incurred. The Countess found the treasure which she had brought with her from London, and which inexperience made her suppose inexhaustible, all dissipated, and the day fixed for the pageant was not yet arrived. What could be done? Apply to the Queen.—Alas! that illustrious lady had long been in a similar situation, and perhaps it was owing to Alicia's inability to

supply her wants, that Her Majesty was provoked to utter the contemptuous expressions already recorded. Beatrice whispered, that Lord Surrey was rich and generous; but the wife of the high-minded Lancaster disdained the insinuated application. She knew that a large sum was deposited in the hands of the seneschal of Pontefract, but that sum was her father's, and sacredly appropriated to defray the charge of the contingent to be furnished by him for the Scottish war. To divert it to her own private expenses would be very unpatriotic, though she knew that the kind De Lacy would forgive his beloved child the misapplication. But to stay at York without it was impossible. The consumption of her retinue was immense; she was not now living in the cheap hospitality which feudal customs permitted to those who resided in their own demesnes, when either under the

heads of produce, rents in kind, or presents, the baron's tables and stalls were furnished with almost every article of consumption; — she was living in an over-peopled city, where luxury trebled the price of every necessary. Prudence whispered, "Return to London, and by dismissing your superfluous retainers to the management of their own private affairs, relieve yourself from this ruinous cost of maintenance;" but she had not yet seen the pageant, which was delayed only to make it more splendid. In this dilemma, she must again consult Sir Hilary.

The obliging confessor admitted that her situation was distressing. He spoke of the virtue of foresight, the duty of calculating expense, the comfort of feeling independent, and uttered various wise old saws, calculated to dissuade the Countess from incurring another insolvency; but since she was already in that

state, and was also sole heiress to the Earl of Lincoln, to anticipate what must in future be her own, could not be called injustice. And as to misapplying a fund intended for public service, the state need not suffer, as the Jews would readily raise any sum on the mortgage of lands, a liberty which the late King had allowed to his barons. The Lady Alicia must, however, submit to a penance, and he could not, on this occasion, be so lenient as in his former inflictions. He was collecting a sum for the charitable sisters of Saint Clare, which was to be devoted, under their auspices, to the orphans of those who might hereafter fall in the Scottish wars, and he must mulct her for their relief. Alicia sighed, and sent the Pontefract seneschal an order to deliver the intrusted treasure to her use. Sir Hilary received a portion adequate to the supposed designs of the pious nuns, or rather, to the deficiencies

which gaming and dissipation had made in his own income; and the plundered seneschal, terrified at a proceeding which he could not resist, posted to London, to inform his venerable lord of his daughter's proceedings.

CHAP. XVI.

The soul's dark cottage, batter'd and decay'd,
Lets in new light through chinks that time has made.

WALLER.

AFTER passing some time in the French court, the Earl of Lancaster discovered, that though for the sake of state finesse, much was said about paternal feeling, wounded honour, and tenderness for female sensibility, Philip the Fair was more inclined to reduce the power of his own nobles, and to make interested attacks on his immediate neighbours, than to a romantic, absurd interference in the domestic quarrels of his daughter. An insight into his designs induced a compromise; and the royal father affected to be pacified by the Earl's

assurance that Edward and Isabella were living in harmony, and that Gaveston, the chief fomenter of their discord, was banished from England, never to return. Relying on his further promise that he would, to the utmost of his power, endeavour to preserve things in this happy train, the King of France agreed to suppress all indication of resentment, and Lancaster returned to England.

Strictly combined with the honour in which this illustrious man held the first table of the moral law, was his observance of the leading injunction of the second. Government in all its shapes, superiority of every class, whatever was decent, wise and venerable, the ties of natural, civil, and religious authority, all claimed his profound regard. His first care, on his arrival in London, was to visit the Earl of Lincoln, who lay on his deathbed, and seemed only to retain his parting

breath that his son-in-law might hear his last councils. Most strange and most lamentable did this seem to the Earl of Lancaster; the great, the good, the brave De Lacy dying, and his daughter not supporting his head on her bosom. It was in a similar attitude that she received the first declaration of love from one who contemplated it as a sure indication that he should be blessed with a peerless wife. Where was Alicia? Lincoln did not complain of her absence. She did not know his extreme danger. Was she well? The Queen had commanded her attendance at York, where the fond father hoped that she was happy.

"Surely," returned Lancaster, "she would have been happier here, discharging a real instead of a fictitious duty."

De Lacy only adjured him to behave kindly to his darling. She had been tenderly cherished, and most fondly indulged.

If ever he should reprove her, he requested him to deal lightly with one whose sensibility made her feel the slightest hint. The temporary coldness of her heart's affections, he said, was as the snow of May, and as rapidly succeeded by the brightest vegetation.

Unwilling to hazard his ability of communicating his dying councils by a longer indulgence of his private feelings, he proceeded to inform his son-in-law of the recal of Gaveston, and the King's proceedings at York; and, contrary to his usual caution, he even stirred up Lancaster's tardiness to resistance, by conjuring him, in the "* most moving terms, not to abandon the church and people of England to the mercy of popes and kings. He told him his birth obliged him to endeavour to free the kingdom from the oppressions it unfortunately laboured

* This speech is copied from Rapin.

under. He charged him to have always a great regard for the King, but withal, he added, this did not hinder him from doing all in his power to remove from his person the foreign ministers and favourites. Honour, conscience, and the public good, called upon him to procure the observance of the great charter, the only basis of the welfare and peace of the kingdom. In conclusion, he advised him to join heartily with the Earl of Warwick, who, among all the confederated lords, was best able to carry on the important undertaking," being actuated by a sincere, disinterested regard for the public welfare.

Lancaster received these councils into an observant, but indignant heart. That the King should choose the period of his absence to recall his favourite, convinced him (though unwilling to adopt sanguinary measures), that death only could rid the kingdom of this pest, and portent,

and that it must be done by his means. While he stood gazing on the corpse of the venerable patriot, and wishing that Gaveston's could be substituted, and that honest heart again permitted to pant for the weal of England, he was informed that the Seneschal of Pontefract had rode post to London, charged with important intelligence to his lord. Lancaster's hopes and fears were busily at work. It might be that he hoped the Earl of Gloucester had cleared the north of the Scottish marauders; perhaps he anticipated an insurrection of the barons, which had saved him the trouble of tearing Gaveston from the King, or more probably his apprehensions were roused for the life and honour of his Alicia. The tale of the Seneschal did not dissipate those fears. Her honour was indeed implicated. She had taken the lead in the dissipations at York; and, to supply her waste, had not scrupled to seize the

treasures of her father ; — that fond, neglected, worthy father, whose dying breath excused her errors. The overcharged eye-lids of Lancaster gave unusual vent, and as his tears fell fast on the cold face of the Earl of Lincoln, he rightly called the emotion grief. " This must not be," said he, as he drew his hand over his brow ; " we are called to immediate action. Return, Seneschal: tell all you have seen to the Countess my wife ; and bid her repair instantly to my castle at Kenilworth, and there hide her sorrow from the world."

He proceeded to give orders for De Lacy's funeral, and sent pursuivants to all the barons of his party, requesting that they would attend the solemn rites, at which he meant to arrange and cement the confederacy which the aged patriot had advised, and his own convictions had determined to be necessary. Warwick, to whom the ties of friendship, and the

advice of Lincoln especially endeared him, was not in London. Was he too gone to display his youthful prowess, and the gallant trim of his equipage, among the York revellers? No, he (Lancaster) heard, with pleasure, that he was in his own demesnes, training his vassals for the Scottish war. So fame reported; but fame, which sometimes obscures real desert, occasionally gives an heroical colouring to motives of a very different nature.

After Lancaster's marriage had removed all apprehensions of a rival to his love, Warwick visited Kenilworth, to observe how Matilda was affected by these espousals. He found her in the deepest affliction. Beauchamp misconstrued the cause, and gave up every hope of diverting her fixed regard. Yet could he not refrain from speaking of the newly wedded pair; and all his apprehensions died away when he saw her listening unconcerned to the narrative, and observing, with ap-

parent pleasure, that the portrait which he drew of the bride would be a cordial to Queen Blanche. "My royal guardian," said she, "is consumed by a disease, which she conceals from her sons, lest it should divert Lancaster from his duty, and retard the recovery of Leicester. Yet, though magnanimity contends with pain, its repeated inroads will subdue mortality. But this morning she confessed to me that she is without hope. Would to heaven as I have shared her bed while living, I might be the partner of her grave! The King grants all wardships to his favourites. I shall be seized as the wealthy prize of some licentious parasite, some dependant on Gaveston, whose bankrupt-fortunes require the support of my lands. Forbidden to enter the shelter of a convent, I have none to help me but the holy Virgin and my guardian angel."

She proceeded to tell Beauchamp that her father's will forbade her taking the

veil, on pain of forfeiting her inheritance. The Earl of Leicester was gone to the south of France, to try the effect of its balsamic air and medicinal springs. Reasons (which, though no longer imperative, still acted forcibly on her delicacy,) forbade her claiming the protection of the Earl of Lancaster. There was one place of refuge, which the Queen of Navarre had herself suggested, the monastic cell of Balshall, a small community of happy nuns, who lived in the neighbourhood of Kenilworth, protected by the Knights Templars. Here, if death robbed her of her monitress and friend, would she reside till misrule became less dangerous, or time induced a happy forgetfulness of her existence; and she entreated Beauchamp, as her knight and friend, to interpose his aid, if the King, or any of his minions, should attempt to violate the freedom of her choice.

In the full sincerity of his soul, War-

wick pledged his sword and life to her defence; but observed, that since the will of Earl Maurice presented an insuperable barrier to her continued seclusion, a baronial castle was a surer asylum from violence than a cell of feeble nuns. His eyes drew the inference, though he imposed silence on his tongue. Matilda understood their language, and her blushes removed the interdict she had imposed. An ecclaircissement took place; all was joy and triumphant hope. Matilda acknowledged that she had mistaken love for friendship; and Warwick urged, that as her guardian possessed the power of bestowing her in marriage, the consent of the Queen of Navarre alone was wanting to remove every apprehension of a constrained and degrading alliance.

While in the presence of a beloved object, and in the happy dawn of mutual confidence and cheerful hope, every difficulty appears to vanish, affection giving

an impulse to the mind which appears like strength. But when Matilda approached the couch on which reclined her suffering guardian, she felt the brief anxieties of love die away in admiration of the fortitude of that heroic princess, who, while struggling with a mortal disease, smiled at pain, and anticipated immortality. As often as she attempted to begin the meditated confession, she reflected how selfish it would be to express anxiety for her own state to one who was writhing with agony, or to distract her attention by solicitudes for the child she regarded with a mother's fondness. Matilda's manner expressed her perplexity; but the Queen's mind was engrossed with the contemplation of her long cherished plan; and letters which had lately arrived with an encouraging account of her son Leicester's improvement in health, made her consider this as the happiest moment for com-

municating her desires. With the calm self-possession which characterizes great minds in the close of life, Blanche again renewed the subject of her own dissolution, and its effects on the fortunes of her young friend. She spoke of Balshall nunnery as a temporary retreat, where obscurity promised privacy, and the twice hallowed sanctity of which, imposing extraordinary respect, prevented all fear of violation. Still, as the only sure guardianship, she recommended marriage. Matilda drooped her head and blushed. The Queen proceeded to say she had a son; Matilda, interrupting, begged she would feel no pain on that subject, for, though gratitude, respect, and admiration would have compelled her obedience, she had lately discovered that the Earl of Lancaster would not have been the choice of her heart, which, she believed, was more prompt to repay humble affection, than to offer itself a spontaneous present

to superior desert. "I have still a son," resumed the Queen, with that smile of full satisfaction which spoke a mind capable of bidding pain begone, and wait its due season: "I have still a son, who shall win that heart on the terms it so nobly requires. So may heaven speed my dearest wishes, by confirming the hopes his letters suggest, as Leicester shall largely pay the tribute due to thy modest dignity. At parting, he confessed to me that he only desired life to spend it with my Matilda, and he received with a more endeared blessing my full approbation of his choice. Why weeps the daughter of my soul? Often has thy infant tongue told me thy dear love for Henry, who strung thy garlands, and tamed thy falcons. Come, then, and to a mother's bosom confess thy confirmed sensibility of his gentle virtues, of the fortitude with which he endured sick-

ness, and forbore to engage thy vows, till hope became the herald of love."

As the Queen gently bowed to receive the desired embrace of a daughter, Matilda dropped on her knees. Her royal friend clasped her to her bosom, but she was still silent. How could she avow, that with the tenderest pity for Leicester's sufferings and respect for his amiable character, her heart was devoted to Warwick? While encircled by those arms which had been her asylum from infancy, she, for the first time, regretted the partial preference that selected her from so many worthier ladies, to be adopted into the house of Lancaster. Could she no other way smooth the death-bed of her honoured guardian, than by dooming herself and the now happy Warwick, to a long life of regret; nor fulfil the ties of gratitude, save by breaking the promise she had

recently given, of adding the name of husband to that of friend and champion?

But Queen Blanche's penetration soon read the meaning of Matilda's looks of perplexity and distress, and her generosity anticipating a painful confession, forbade the sacrifice on which grateful duty pondered. She not only saw the embarrassment of love, but determined that the gay and gallant friend of Lancaster must be that obstacle to the wishes of Leicester, which the tears and confusion of Matilda tacitly avowed. At one period of her life, when, admired as a woman and honoured as a Queen, the wishes of Blanche were always anticipated, and her looks were equivalent to commands, this second frustration of her long cherished hopes might have been received with avowed displeasure; but sickness had disrobed her soul for the grave, not by chilling the tender affections, but by

relaxing that tenacious hold of earthly power, which is the last proof of a sordid, imperious mind. With the policy and forethought of the Queen and mother, were now mingled the conviction that she was one of that perishable race, whose generations successively occupy the places assigned by Omnipotence; and as they pass away, leave their unfinished plans and forgotten desires to be fulfilled or marred by strangers. Blanche meditated on her long line of progenitors, who had, for ages, experienced the protection of an immutable, all-wise, all-merciful Providence! could she not confide her descendants to the same ever-watchful care? How often had she seen events occur which rendered that undesirable, which it had been the previous labour of a life to attain. An unconditional restraint imposed on an ingenuous mind, is like a spur to courage, or a menace to inte-

grity. "Who," said she to herself, "that has looked on life with a discerning eye, but must feel that neither policy, strength, nor authority can so overrule the course of human actions, as to connect happiness with prosperity, or even to insure our hearts from being wounded by the gratification of our desires? Why then, should I stretch out my hand from the grave, and say to those who have a long course of years before them, 'Do thus to content one, who, ere thou canst obey, will have lost all consciousness of sublunary concerns.' O, mortal creature! remember thou art thyself on the confines of eternity; be not, therefore, busy among the rubbish of time, nor forge, with a hand crumbling into dust, indissoluble chains for a being as intelligent and susceptible as thyself."

Actuated by sentiments so consonant to real greatness and true affection,

Blanche impressed a maternal kiss on Matilda's cheek, and bade her again kneel and receive her blessing. "May you," said she, "be happy with the man whose humble affection your heart rewards. I will only impose one restriction. So order your bridal peal that it shall not be the knell of my Leicester."

We will pass over the grateful acknowledgements of Matilda, who bound herself, by a solemn obligation, that no apprehensions of personal danger should induce her to become Warwick's wife, without the cheerful consent of Henry Plantagenet.

At their last interview, the Earl of Warwick appointed Guy's chapel (a scene endeared by their first meeting), as the spot where he should receive the anticipated consent of the Queen of Navarre. His ardent spirit did not allow him to foresee any obstacles to a plan he had formed for their immediate mar-

riage, which, if solemnized during the life of her guardian, would receive that full validity, from her consent, which would defy the power of the Pope or the King to cancel. Matilda had allowed him to hope, that, if she could be spared from attendance on the Queen, she would visit that favourite scene of her devotions during the vesper-service; he considered that the officiating priest would be at hand, and though the sun had not finished his course since Matilda plighted her troth, their attachment was not ephemeral; it resulted from long and intimate knowledge of each other's worth; it had been proof to jealousy, misapprehension, and absence: why, then, should not the nuptial benediction be pronounced, which would free her from danger and him from fear? Seated on the stone-coffin which held the remains of the mighty Guy, he ruminated on all the arguments he would

use, to prevail on Matilda to put it out of the power of fate to separate them. He would alarm her fears by narrating (as truth permitted him to do), the injurious alliances into which the King had forced several illustrious ladies, over whom he exercised the power of wardship. He would instance Margaret of Gloucester, and describe to Matilda's happy ignorance, which had never come in contact with tyranny and vice, the savage insolence and neglect with which the gay buffoon, Gaveston, treated that royal and amiable lady. The scene would also supply a topic of persuasion, while he deprecated the procrastinating coyness of Lady Phyllis, which drove the brave Sir Guy to despair, and changed the glory of Christendom into a melancholy hermit. Fear, pity, a pleading lover, a recently acknowledged love, a consenting guardian, an attending priest! Could a tender, ena-

moured maid resist such persuasions? Often did he rise to observe the road leading from Kenilworth, and as often mistook the echo of his own footsteps for the trampling of horses. Grown impatient, he ordered the priest to ring the vesper-bell, to hasten the worshippers. Still Matilda did not appear. The hymn to the Virgin finished without the aid of her melodious voice. It was repeated, and he fancied he heard her voice from the bottom of the cliff, distinctly join in this petitionary couplet:

> "O, then, sweet advocate, bestow
> "A pitying look on us below."

When all the congregation had retired, Beauchamp waited in the chantry, half afraid to breathe, lest he should not catch the first light footstep of his approaching love. A footstep was heard; he incautiously exclaimed, "Is it my

Matilda?" and was answered, "No." A joyous laugh and a light jest, at the detected subterfuge which concealed its indulged amours, under the pretence of training his vassals to martial exercises, announced Gondibert Fitzallan, a kinsman of the Earl of Arundel's, the friend of Surrey, and a favourite of the King. Seating himself on Sir Guy's coffin, he swore, by the sword of the old chieftain, he would not stir till he had discovered the fair anchoret who detained him from the beauteous bevy that pleasure, and the King's mandate, collected on the banks of the Ouse.

Warwick was in no humour for raillery. To be thus unseasonably interrupted, in what he felt to be the crisis of his fate, was more exasperating, as Gondibert was not a man to be intrusted with secrets connected with a lady's honour, or that fidelity which friend owes to friend. Of all the knights in

King Edward's court, he was the one whom he least wished should discover the beauty and situation of Matilda. To prevent this dreaded evil, he raised his voice to an higher key, well knowing that she would not appear while he was conversing with a stranger. Gondibert continued to rally him on his assignation, till Beauchamp, unable otherwise to account for the greeting he had bestowed, pretended to confess an inclination for a fair wanton, from whom he would disengage his thoughts, and listen to Gondibert's details of the proceedings at York. This theme, he proposed, should enliven their carousals at Warwick-castle, whither he pressed him to go.

The young Earl was too little practised in disguise to deceive a finished courtier. Gondibert declined the proposed hospitality, and in his turn, speaking in a loud tone, he declared himself honoured with the commands of a beauteous Queen,

to haste and liberate a fair nymph from bondage, and therefore bound, as a true knight, to refuse every personal indulgence which might cause delay. His mission was to Kenilworth. Warwick trembled. Isabella had heard of the wit and beauty of Lady Matilda, whom the superannuated Queen of Navarre shut up in that castle, and had sent him, with a gallant train, to entreat her presence at a court where the bravest knights in Christendom were now assembled; among whom she might gain a lover worthy her high desert and fair fortunes. Should persuasion prove ineffectual, his attendants were sufficiently numerous to give efficiency to other means of completing this generous design.

Warwick's apprehensions for the immediate safety and honour of Matilda, again induced him to descend to an ill-contrived falsehood. He was persuaded

that the lady was near, his attendants were dismissed; — Gondibert's, by his own account, armed and at hand. Was his own sword sufficient for the protection of his love? He tried to laugh at the knight-errantry of Fitzallan; spoke of Matilda as best fitted for the retirement in which she lived, and asked him how he would endure the gibing courtiers, when, instead of a fair accomplished beauty, he should produce an ill-favoured hoyden. Inexpert at deceit, the tremulous voice and ill-disguised agitation of the lover, confirmed Gondibert's suspicions who the Matilda was, for whom he waited in Guy's chapel. "Spare yourself," said he, gaily, "the trouble of these useless falsehoods; deal with me as a friend, and own that the daughter of Earl Maurice is as kind as she is lovely."

Though Warwick blushed at his own meanness, in attempting to deceive, he

would not, even to rescue her fair form from Gondibert, utter a whisper reflecting on Matilda's fame. His only course now was to endeavour, by a full confidence, to engage that honour, which, even in the most unprincipled, sometimes shrinks from treachery. He conjured Fitzallan to reserve his censures of his conduct, till love familiarized him with that strange intruder in a soldier's bosom, fear. Matilda's endowments were, in all respects, unrivalled; they were contracted lovers, and ere she could be forced from the protection of her royal guardian, marriage would give him a right to meet, with unsheathed sword, any braggart who dared to impugn her liberty.

Fitzallan answered, he admitted this brave frankness as a tie upon his own honour: nay, farther, he would report to the expectant courtiers, that Earl Maurice's daughter was a betrothed vestal, whom it would be as presump-

tuous to woo and as hopeless to win, as it would have been to tilt with the renowned Sir Guy for Lady Phyllis, or to break King Arthur's sword, Excaliber, and carry off Queen Guniver. He then gave a gay account of their Christmas merriment at York, and so spoke of the levity and extravagance of Lancaster's fair bride, as might have deterred a less determined lover than Beauchamp from entering into a state in which man subjects his peace and honour to woman's infirm judgment and wavering inclinations.

The young Earl was ignorant that the fair object, whom his fancy invested with all her sex's virtues, and separated from all her foibles, had overheard part of this conversation. True to her appointment, Matilda left her attendants at the bottom of the cliff, and entered the chapel alone, concealed by the twilight, a few moments after Fitzallan. She staid long

enough to hear her plighted lord avow a base attachment, and speak of her as one who owed her attractions to her patrimonial lands, while Gondibert acknowledged a design which realized all the fears she had long entertained for her own freedom and happiness. Distressed and terrified, she stole out of the chapel with silent speed, and eluding the suite of Gondibert, whose shining helmets discovered their situation, flew back to Kenilworth; where, at the feet of Queen Blanche, she confessed all she had overheard, without disguising her love for Warwick, or the assignation which led to this painful knowledge of his unworthiness. Blending, with the fears of virgin timidity, the miseries of ill-placed affection, she supplicated her guardian to sanction her taking the veil; and, by the forfeiture of an inheritance which exposed her to so many perils, purchase security and peace.

When ingenuous simplicity candidly entrusts its sorrows to wisdom and experience, its difficulties diminish as well as its fears. The Queen of Navarre was too high minded to apply the misapprehensions of Matilda, to the furtherance of her son's love. The derogatory expressions of Warwick admitted an obvious explanation; and a reliance on her own power, reputation, and dignity, would not allow her to suspect that the King, her nephew, would licence such a violation of her rights, as to force her ward from her protection. Yet, knowing that the extravagance of the Arundel family had rendered them necessitous, she thought it probable Gondibert might visit Kenilworth; and, on seeing Matilda, make love a pretext for an impertinent address, injurious to her peace, if not dangerous to her safety. She ordered, therefore, a strong escort to convey her to Balshall; but, as she bestowed her

parting blessing, conjured her not to permit the inticements of the sisterhood and her own temporary, and probably ill-founded disgust at life, to counteract the will of her father, dictated by long experience and the soundest policy. The threat she had heard of carrying her to court, might be a boast or a menace, rather than a confirmed purpose. Warwick might wish to deceive an enemy, or in that gross levity of conversation in which men indulge, utter sentiments foreign to his heart. The ties formed by a long acquaintance, must not be lightly broken; actions will speak; and the lover, who was enough the object of affection to be favoured with confidential proofs of chaste preference, must not, for the sake of her own fair fame, be lightly discarded: and even should time, that test of the human character, prove Beauchamp unworthy, "Still," said the Queen, "let my remembered

history impress on your mind two truths, important to your future peace. Formed for society, as the sphere of our duties and the proof of our virtues, it rarely happens that a first disappointment so benumbs the heart, as to render it callous to all the social ties. Grief, and the frustration of our early hopes, are too apt to induce a susceptible mind to shade its future years with the gloom of despair. But the sun will again rise on the morning of vernal life, brighten the dark colourings of impatience, and teach the sincere but feeble mind to revere that Providence which corrects its presumption, and dispels its apprehensions. The vicissitudes of many years have taught me to substitute thankfulness for complaint. The avocations of my widowhood may also teach you that the world, religion calls upon us to renounce, may be avoided without secluding ourselves from that in which the same authority

commands us to appear as a shining light, exciting others to faith and charity."

The Seneschal now announced that the escort was ready; and Queen Blanche closed her parting charge, with a command, that Matilda's continuance in the nunnery should be determined by considerations of her own safety, and not by a recollection of the privations which her friend would suffer from the want of her dutiful attentions.

CHAP. XVII.

Hear me more plainly.
I have in equal balance justly weigh'd
What wrongs our arms may do, what wrongs we suffer;
And find our griefs heavier than our offences.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE obsequies of the Earl of Lincoln were prepared with a solemn magnificence corresponding to his birth and his virtues. Lancaster awaited the summons to attend as chief mourner, when he was at once gratified and afflicted by the appearance of Warwick, who came, he said, to claim, as a dutiful ward, the right of supporting him in the sad ceremony. The tributary regret due to departed worth was paid, and the woes and wrongs of England copiously discussed over the corpse. The Earls agreed that

the sword must be the last resource to extort from the King that observance of his vows, which neither interest, honour, nor conscience could compel. But the countenances of these nobles exhibited a sullen melancholy, which did not exactly correspond with those stern feelings of indignant heroism which urged them to pass the Rubicon, and plunge England into the horrors of civil war, as the only alternative to avoid ruin. Their dejection spoke how deeply private distress heightened the feeling of public calamity. They reasoned on their own future destiny, as men indifferent to their prospects; yet while their secret discontent abated the value of their self-devotedness, it gave energy to their determination of perishing in the cause of freedom. Habits of long and friendly intimacy required and justified the fullest confidence; and they soon discovered that this was not the meeting of a happy husband and a suc-

cessful lover. The Earl of Lancaster confessed, that levity and dissipation had robbed him of that full confidence in his wife which was essential to his peace; and Warwick, after painting the hopes which Matilda's ingenuous confession had inspired, with all the sanguine glow of impassioned fancy, proceeded to describe the death-like chill which hung upon his heart ever since her green-liveried page apologized for the broken assignation, and stated, that his lady had left the protection of the Queen of Navarre, and thrown herself into a nunnery.

We will avoid repeating those ungallant reproaches on an insatiable thirst for pleasure, and weak infirmity of purpose, which these querulous barons asserted were the characteristics of women. But the more saturnine displeasure of Lancaster checked the impetuous vehemence of Warwick. "We are not," said he, "two Provençal advocates, pleading a

love-cause at their mock tribunal; neither is the one a champion of the glove, nor the other a knight of the fan, killed by a frown and revived by a smile. Let our hearts be stern as the times; and if life presents to our view no temples dedicated to domestic happiness, let us felicitate ourselves that there are fewer obstacles to interrupt our prospect when honour calls on us to look on our sepulchres."

The corpse of De Lacy was interred with all those impressive honours with which religion consecrates the memory of the good and the brave. The metropolitan cathedral was hung with black, every shrine was lighted with tapers, and lamps were placed on the monuments of the mighty dead, whose banners, waving over their effigies, seemed to invite to their silent assembly the remains of the warrior who desired that his corpse might be buried in the habiliments which characterised the most important warfare in

which he had been engaged. The muffled drum and sonorous trumpet, whose thrilling tone is even deemed significant of the revivificating summons of the archangel, announced the approach of the bier. It was preceded by a long procession of the Earl's ancient alms-men, two and two, clad in black gowns, and bearing immense torches. These were followed by the choir, dressed in white surplices, chaunting a dirge, and the priests and canons, with rochets over their pontifical robes, displaying relics and crucifixes to the kneeling multitude. The body was surrounded by the household servants, bearing tapers, and over it was held a black velvet canopy, decorated with lofty plumes. Lancaster and Warwick followed first; after them Hereford, Pembroke, and a long train of patriotic nobles; the whole closing with men at arms trailing their pikes, and archers with relaxed bowstrings. The corpse was de-

posited beneath its own banner; a pursuivant proclaimed the titles which it had once borne; and the shield it could no longer raise was laid upon the grave. All was hushed, even the voice of sorrow was suspended, when the Earl of Lancaster, who was seated by the episcopal throne, rose to address the people. He seemed to stand absorbed in contemplation; his hands crossed on his bosom, his countenance pale, and his eyes fixed on heaven; but after a few moments of solemn recollection, he turned them towards his auditory, and thus proceeded:

"Sorrow for irremediable losses," said he, "is the characteristic of weak minds, when it is querulously indulged at a period which requires to be marked by action. The solemn pomp of woe which attends the funeral of men exalted by their worth is not designed to call forth a more than ordinary flood of tears, but to excite that worthy emulation which

may supply the void that death has made. One chief who dies in the arms of victory, calls into action a host of conquerors; as the martyr, who springs to heaven from a pyramid of flames, expires travailing in birth of multitudes of saints, to whom his blood proves the unction of baptism. And shall the death of a patriot be less fruitful, when, full of days and of glory, he is carried to his grave, like the waive sheaf to the sanctuary, a type and a promise of a redundant harvest? A harvest of freedom, of glory, and of peace; but a harvest which we who survive must reap with sharpened swords and full-drawn bows; with limbs fainting under the pressure of our iron mail, and brows worn with the load of our weighty morions. But further, it is a harvest, the fruit of which our children will eat in joyful security, while such of us whose grey heads have not fallen in the gathering, shall be pointed out to the

admiration of virtuous gratitude, and enjoy that first gift of the Divine Ruler of mankind, the allowed repose of honourable old age."

The Earl of Lancaster then addressed the Londoners, asking them if they who, under Cassibellan, resisted Cæsar in the fulness of his power, and the freshness of his Gallic victories, were content that their King should be governed by a low-born foreigner, as weak in intellect as he was base in principle, and rapacious in conduct. He called on all who loved De Lacy; on those whom he fed, instructed, patronized, defended; on all who revered the memory of that monarch, by whose side the noble crusader fought in Palestine, to rescue their prince from the fascination of a vain Gascon, who wished to depress England in the scale of nations. Edward the Great, on his death-bed, doomed Gaveston to banishment, and extorted an oath from his nobles, binding

them to execute his sentence. Would they not unanimously lend their aid to enforce the injunctions of that King, whose reign was the era of their prosperity; whose institutions diffused happiness, by teaching every man that knowledge of individual importance which inclined him to respect the franchises of his neighbour? The dying counsels of De Lacy, founded on the same immutable principles, pointed out the only means of rescuing the kingdom and the King from inglorious bondage. To the sword he reluctantly appealed; but alike faithful as a subject, and honest as a patriot, he did it not to impugn, but to guard the rights of the crown, which he devoutly prayed might long sit easily and shine gloriously on the royal brow. It was for the sake of the infant prince, on whom might the mantle of his grandsire, with a double portion of his spirit and ability, descend, to make England great and happy! These

were his views, and these alone; and if fear quailed his purpose, or sinister ambition warped his intentions, he now declared to those nobles and freemen, whom he invited to rally round the banners of Lancaster and Lincoln, that they should stand absolved from their engagements to him, leaving him exposed to the ignominy, opprobrium, and danger, which are the fit portions of cowardly rebels and treacherous usurpers: "May my bones," continued he, "never mingle with the dust of my royal ancestors; may they never even be gathered within the consecrated inclosure of a Christian sanctuary; and may the violent death of the felon and the traitor suspend my remains to the gaze of the vulgar, without either wife or child to shroud their dishonour! But till I forfeit your confidence by my unworthiness, or till a leader offers more worthy your trust, brothers in arms and fellow-soldiers! in defence of the Great

Charter, and the honour of your King, let us, over the grave of the good Earl of Lincoln, pledge the oath of mutual fidelity."

This appeal was answered by the tossing up of caps and the clashing of swords. The populace of London, whom the King's emissaries had in vain endeavoured to form into a party against the barons, readily enlisted under their standards, having been ever inclined to the cause of freedom, since they took so decided a part in the insurrection of Simon de Montford. Nor did the bishops and priests, whom this solemn ceremony assembled, endeavour to abate this enthusiasm. Being composed of the most enlightened part of the sacerdotal order, they respected the independence of the English church, and saw that it was the design of the King's evil counsellors, by their entire submission to the Roman pontiff, to purchase from him a full immunity for their

inroads on the English constitution, under the covenant of their permitting him to exercise spiritual supremacy. The nobles moved from distant parts of the choir, to assemble round De Lacy's grave, but that spot was already occupied: a female penitent lay upon the earth, in the extremest agonies of grief; the ashes which were strewed upon her head disfigured her countenance; and her amice of coarse sackcloth entirely enveloped her person. Some of the attendants attempted to chide away the sad intruder, but she was insensible to their threats; and a compassionate priest bore her in his arms from the spot, just as the Earl of Lancaster descended from the throne to meet his associates in arms, receive their vows, and accept the office of leader of the confederation, to which his birth and character alike called him. Yet even during the warm glow of patriotism, the throb of honourable ambition, and the apprehen-

sions which the welfare of millions thus entrusted to his care excited, he felt for the sorrows of the penitent whom the priest was bearing from the tumultuary scene; and hearing that she was an unknown, friendless mourner for the Earl of Lincoln, he gave orders that she should be conveyed to the Savoy palace.

As soon as his public duties were ended, he dismissed the now cumbrous train who waited upon and applauded his newly-invested honours, and retired from the clamorous cry of "Lancaster for England!" to his oratory, to commune with his own heart, to examine his capability, and to discover and guard against his frailties, previous to his entering on the high functions he had assumed. His devotions were interrupted by the arrival of a pursuivant, sent to announce that the Countess of Lancaster, with a sumptuous train, was on her way to London, to attend the funeral of her

father, and had halted at the village of Islington to receive his commands. And did the unnatural daughter and disobedient wife, whose conduct he so strongly reprobated, indeed bear his name? Full of emotion for De Lacy's wrongs and his own shames, with feelings still more powerfully agitated by the solemn scene at which he had just assisted, he replied, that he had no commands for the Countess of Lancaster, but wished to speak to the grateful penitent who wept so bitterly over the good Earl of Lincoln, since, by her sensibility, which he supposed was excited by the loss of one friend, she had secured another. Self-respect prevented him from adding, that he had rather console her sorrows, than attend to the cumbrous pride and ill-timed parade of one who appeared to have forgotten that first command, to whose obedience Heaven attached the promise of temporal blessing.

The penitent appeared. Her golden

locks were cleansed from the symbol of humiliation; they fell as a veil over her face, but their luxuriance and beauty proclaimed their owner. "Cast me not off!" said she, falling at his feet. "Cast not off your self-condemned Alicia, though you renounce the vain dissipated Countess of Lancaster!"

Amazed and terrified, the Earl raised her, and grasping her clasped hands, as one who would prevent a deed of desperation, exclaimed, "Can it be my wife in this penitentiary garb, and suppliant posture? Why not attend your father's obsequies in your proper character? Why renounce, with the duties of your station, the attendance and the dignity my rank, and your own birth, require?"

"I am your faithful wife," returned the Lady Alicia, "who, renouncing the vain pursuit of evanescent pleasure, comes contrite for her follies, to be corrected by your clemency, and fashioned by your

example. It did not beseem one who knew she had omitted her first duties, to appear in state at the funeral of that father, whose death-bed she had never smoothed. You, my generous lord, are the only witness of my self-imposed humiliation; and your pardon for my past indiscretions, will so renovate my sinking heart, and confirm my resolution, that I shall not fear to tell a censorious, inquisitive world, by my future conduct, that I am indeed the princely Lancaster's wife, restored to my own confidence, and enjoying his."

"My Alicia!" said the Earl, as he folded her in his arms; "I forgive the past, and have hope of the future. Thou hast discovered the avenues to my heart; but do not enter it again by this agonizing portal; though thou hast found that the tear of penitence, and the blush of self-reproach subdue a disposition on

which the blandishments of beauty would have been tried in vain."

It was the first offence of his beloved consort, — Lancaster was sanguine in his hopes that it would be her last. Alicia was also fixed in her determination to be henceforth a most observant wife. She had been disappointed in her pursuit of happiness, and now as much undervalued the powerful temptation of prospective pleasures, as she formerly had remained ignorant how surely satiety of enjoyment creates remorse.

" But will not my dear lord," said she, with a plaintive smile, " suffer me to follow his banner, whether it points to glory or to danger ? Not that I now distrust my prudence, even if I were left to my own guidance, for my renunciation of the court is full and entire ; the disgust of conviction, the enmity of ensnared ignorance at duplicity and frivolity. But during the stormy days, which must

precede a kingdom's renovation, I shall want a protector, and you a ministring attendant. You will not leave me exposed to insults and dangers, but suffer me to act as your page, to burnish your mail, to prepare the bath, and dress your tent when you return from battle; and then to sing you to sleep with a supplicatory hymn to your guardian angel. So Eleanora of Castile acted, and thus dearest Lancaster would I."

To the romantic tenderness of this proposal the Earl answered, that the warfare on which he was going to enter, differed widely from the pompous tournament, when knights fought in trim parade, and lodged in rich pavilions; and ladies sat to witness a bloodless combat, and adjudge the reward of skill and activity. The war he must wage was, of all others, the most ferocious. The prize was not a purpled scarf, or a golden chain; but life, liberty, honour, the prosperity of

the present age, the security of the future. Courage must put forth all its strength; policy mature all its counsels; and man meet man pre-determined to die or conquer. "My mail," added he, "will want no polish, but the friction of continuous conflict; the nearest rivulet will be at once my bath and beverage; the earth my bed; and heaven's concave my pavilion. I trust, too, my guardian angel will hear a soldier's brief prayer, whose thoughts must not be diverted from the high duties annexed to his awful responsibility, by his fears for his beloved wife's safety, or his delight in her society. The pre-eminence which your father's desires, and the choice of my brother-patriots, have conferred on me, is that of danger, care, and labour. We war against luxury; and must hold no secret league with the enemy of our country. Not one privation will I escape, not one indulgence will I enjoy, that shall draw a

sigh of regret from the meanest of my compatriots; or confirm the forgeries of envy, when she talks of the forgotten soldiers' sufferings, and the fortunate general's gratifications and rewards."

Alicia listened unconvinced, fancying that the warrior's wants and labours could not greatly exceed the regimen of Father Ambrose, or the fatigue and mortification of a court life. On the former topic she was compelled to be silent, the piety of her lord not permitting the extravagance of a zeal, which he accounted sincere, to be treated with censure or levity; but in describing the wearisome routine, absurdly named pleasure, she gratified him in being copious; and though she did not convince him that she was fit to brave the brunt of battle, he was persuaded that disappointment would habituate her to the exercise of that fortitude which is truly feminine. "Surely," said he to himself, "a woman, who has

so strongly felt the serpent sting of convenient friendships, has seen envy's mildew blast merit, and promised assistance prove a quicksand to ingulph the unwary; she who has fainted under the toil of amusement, and durst not drop the mockery of those constrained smiles, which outraged a heart throbbing with insupportable disgust; she whose keen sensibilities shake her frame, while she recounts these her trials, must henceforth renounce the witcheries of pleasure, and be a votaress of the domestic virtues."

But with a confidence re-assured by every new discovery of her altered sentiments, the Earl of Lancaster felt more determined to place his consort at a distance from danger. A camp, he told her, was only a scene fit for extraordinary female heroism, and consummate prudence. Tenderly as he prized her virtues, they were of a different cast from Eleanora's of Castile; and ere she at-

tempted to take that princess for her model, she must train her mind, by gradual imitation, to become her copyist. He would first recommend to her the daily exercises of devotion, till her soul, raised to form a proper estimate of sublunary good, would be superior to the light agitation of passing events, and thus preserved from the elation incident to success, or the fear of destitution in the hour of calamity. It was her duty also to pray for the militant soldier; to offer oblations for the souls of those who fell in the glorious cause; to provide for their widows and orphans; and to supply the wants of the maimed. Alicia readily agreed to all these preparatory duties. Her castles, she said, should become the asylums of the unfortunate; and in every thing she would be guided by the counsels of her confessor. This promise did not perfectly square with the previous sincerity of her purposes, for she was sen-

sible that Sir Hilary's moral code differed from her lord's. But her terror of having Father Ambrose forced upon her, induced her to conceal this discovery, and she recollected that she was at liberty to dismiss him whenever she found him too indulgent; while the Earl of Lancaster, from his respect for churchmen, and attention to what he deemed just confidence in his wife, alike abstaining from all interference in her household, and from suspecting that an agreeable vivacity of manners was synonymous with a toleration of immorality, rested satisfied in Alicia's promised deference to her ghostly father.

The first step which the confederated barons agreed to take, was to repair to their respective counties, and summon their vassals to arms. The maternal estates of the Countess of Lancaster lay in the west of England, and there the Earl determined to erect his standard,

and make Canford-castle (a magnificent pile on the banks of the Stour, close to Wimborn minster,) the rendezvous of his party. Alicia wished to accompany him to what had been for generations the seat of the Earls of Salisbury, observing, that her presence and influence would expedite the levy. To this Lancaster strongly objected, commenting on the invidious indelicacy of her appearing active in raising forces, which must ostensibly act against the royal personages, for whom she had professed personal friendship; on the needless irritation of such a proceeding; and on the danger to which it would expose her, without any benefit to the cause, since she would from henceforth be rightly considered as a principal in the war, and, in forfeiting the privileges which chivalry bestowed on her sex, would subject herself to imprisonment, or harsher treatment, if she fell into the King's power. He further ar-

gued, that though Canford-castle was strong enough to sustain a regular siege, it was too far distant, from what promised to be the centre of their operations, for him to spare a sufficient force for its defence, without injury to the common cause. He advised, therefore, that she should reside with her mother, under the protection of the nuns of Amesbury, or with Queen Blanche, at his well-fortified royalty of Kenilworth, till the war ended. Of two plans, neither of which were very palatable, Alicia preferred the latter, as imposing the least restriction on that liberty which she was now desirous of using, to regain the reputation which her extravagance and dissipation had forfeited. Early severity occasioned a painful chill as often as she recollected the image of the Countess of Lincoln; and she had the address to give such an engaging colouring to her choice of his mother, that the Earl of Lancaster was persuaded that she

would come from the purifying ordeal of the Queen of Navarre's society, as perfect in discretion, and every domestic virtue, as she was now in grace and beauty.

The time of their separation could no longer be delayed; the barons were all gone to their respective posts, and Sir Robert Holland, with his troops, was ready to escort Alicia. The general must not be tardy; he was armed and prepared to go, but lingered for a moment, unmanned by the tears of his Countess. Unused to control her feelings, she, on the present occasion, fancied that there was virtue in their excess. She hung on her Lord's arm, she followed him to the door, when he attempted to break from her, and by her hysterical sobs compelled him to return, and support her. She called this conjugal affection, not considering how grievously it increased the perturbation

of that noble heart, which should have gone forth braced to its trials, by its dependence on her fortitude. To check this extravagance of lamentation, he shewed her from the court of his palace the separation of a soldier and his family. The man was an artisan, on whom that family depended for support; he embraced each of his children with fervour, and bestowed on them an agnus dei or a crucifix as a memorial, giving a fonder kiss to the youngest, a smiling infant, whom he placed in the arms of its mother. The woman stood firm, suspending even her sighs, while she listened to his parting advice; it was only that she would attend daily at the convent of the Grey Friars, who would feed her and her children, but never be importunate, or take more than sufficed hunger, because multitudes were as destitute as herself. If he was slain, he enjoined her (if even by the sale of her wedding-ring), to purchase a

wax-taper and some frankincense, and offer it to a priest, to procure a mass for his soul. He finally conjured her never to despair, though she begged her bread, and to bring up her boys true-hearted Englishmen. These injunctions being bestowed, the nameless hero followed the pennon of his leader, contented and resolved; and his patient partner, drying her eyes in silence, collected her desolate family, and retired, to enter on a life of penury.

"Is the descendant of the Earls of Lincoln and Salisbury," said the General, addressing his Countess, "whom fame follows to her privacies, whom wealth encircles with its comforts, over whom power extends its shield, whom the brave will rush to defend, and the enlightened to admire, less equal to the performance of her prescribed duties than this destitute mother, who collects her ragged children, and shields them from the cold sleet with

their father's cast gabardine? Her dependence is a life of mendicity; her resource from famine, the unsavoury offal of a frugal convent; yet she has the same feelings, passions, desires as thyself. To her, sufficiency is as grateful, rest as sweet, want as bitter. Think of her often, not with useless pity, but with generous emulation. Fastidious greatness may receive an improving lesson from the mute endurance of indigence, whenever it condescends to remember, that as they are equal in the eyes of the universal Lord, so in respect of corporeal feeling, they are brothers of the same family, with only this difference, that indulgence has in one case fomented sensibility, and in the other, privation has subdued it."

"Then, how," returned Alicia, "can her sensibility equal mine? Scarcely accustomed to animal pleasures, a stranger to those of intellect, she never even for

an hour enjoyed the happiness which I expose to imminent peril."

"Nor can she," resumed the Earl, "acquire glory by sacrificing it with heroism; nor hope for reflected renown, derived from the fame of her husband. The silence of uninterrupted sorrow, the gloom of unregarded patience, will shroud her days, chill her hopes, and consign her name to oblivion. But whether we meet again in my palace, or on my scaffold; whether thou shalt be required to embroider a robe for my triumph, or to adjust the bracings of my grave-cloaths, the eyes of thy contemporaries are fixed upon thee; and fame, which records thy name among the great ones of the earth, shall teach posterity to sit in judgment on thy behaviour. Yet, awful as this consideration seems, it is but a puerile incitement; for remember, that all-seeing eye, which overlooks not the outcast on the dunghill, minutely watches

thee; and at that hour, when merciful allowance will be made for the errors of ignorance, and the infirmities of over-tempted indigence, thou and I, dearest wife, will be required to render a strict account of our intrusted ten talents, for the mis-usings of reputation, of knowledge, of time, of friends, of wealth, of power, and of every endowment which we thanklessly dash in the donor's face, or misapply through perverted appetite. Placed on the large theatre of public life, with men and angels for our spectators, and our Creator for our judge, let us patiently encounter its annexed privations, and meditate on our duties, and the rewards so graciously promised, till our dolours are exchanged for gratulations, and generous zeal stimulates the exertions which regret would palsy. So numerous and so fatal are the snares which beset us fostered children of prosperous fortunes, that when our emancipated spirits have soared above

the mists of time, we shall largely rejoice at every admonitory trial which assisted us to burst the bonds of sloth and sensuality."

With these words the Earl sprang upon his charger, while the flourish of trumpets and acclamations of a joyous multitude, who hailed his long-expected appearance, drowned the parting sobs of the Countess. Yet, stimulated by his persuasions, she tried to act the heroine, following him with firmness to the gates of the palace, and as he turned to look his last farewell, waved her veil, in token that she would observe his counsels. The exquisite beauty of her countenance, and the gracefulness of her action, drew the attention of the populace, who showered their blessings upon her in loud cries of "Heaven preserve thee, lovely lady! May the blessed Mary comfort thee, for the sake of the good Earl Thomas of Lancaster!" These exhilarating cries,

issuing from a thousand different voices, whose countenances spoke the rapture of sincere affection, gave a new turn to Alicia's feelings, and while they shewed her the privileges that belonged to a hero's wife, strengthened her ability to support its character. Almost forgetting her Lord's dangers, in her desire to obey his instructions, she set off for Kenilworth, determined to be the diligent pupil of Queen Blanche, and the faithful copist of Queen Eleanora.

The Earl of Lancaster proceeding to Canford-castle, proposed visiting the monastery of Amesbury in his way, to relate to the Countess of Lincoln, for whose reported piety and charity he conceived a high reverence, the particulars of her husband's death, and her daughter's espousals. But the strict rule which that lady had adopted, would not allow her the indulgence of seeing her princely son-in-law; she sent him therefore, by

her confessor, her greetings, and some valuable relicks, namely, a small quantity of St. Dunstan's beard, and some stones, spotted with the blood of Saint Winifred. She further signified her full approbation of his designs to reform a dissolute court, wishing him to regard one of the treasures she sent as a memento confirming his hatred to licentious, tyrannical kings, which procured the blessed prelate, to whom it belonged, a high rank among the confessors and champions of the church; while the other would, if employed with due faith, and rigid mortification, heal all the wounds he received in the sacred cause. In conclusion, she conjured him to avoid even a political connexion with the abandoned, bloody Earls of Surrey and Mortimer, giving his confidence only to men of spotless character, and firm principles; and in all cases, to prefer the interests of the church to all worldly motives; yet while he

washed the palace with the blood of the foreign revellers who had polluted it, to respect the holy bishops whom their good father, the Pope, had sent, to instruct the nation in a more perfect rule of Christian practice. On these terms, she sent the Earl her blessing and prayer, that he might be rewarded with length of days, and a numerous issue.

Lancaster received this extraordinary message as he entered on the demesne-lands appropriated to the earldom of Salisbury. On these confines he was also met by a princely train of knights and esquires, each under his own banner, and at the head of his respective archers or heavy-armed cuirassiers. They had assembled on first seeing the standard mounted on the turrets of Canford, and now appeared in all the pomp of feudal array, ready to follow to battle the chieftian, whom they saluted with loud acclamations, and an inspiring swell of military

music. Illustrious for his birth, his virtues, and the rank which the confidence of the confederated barons had bestowed upon him, they proceeded to escort the princely stranger to the residence of the puissant Earl of Salisbury, like himself renowned for piety and valour.

But before the Earl would consent to receive the keys of his castle, he repaired to Wimborn Minster, to pay his devotions. Not satisfied with a liberal offering to Saint Cuthberg, the patroness of the family, he required to be conducted to the cemetery, where the progenitors of his Countess were preserved from mingling with the common dust, piously considering a sight of human greatness in this state of destitution, the best preparative for his inauguration into their abdicated possessions. He stopped at every coffin, inquiring the name and the actions of the dead, whose dust it con-

tained, observing, with surprise, that the silver handles were burnished, the velvet coverings perfectly clean, and that a cresset, newly trimmed, hung in the centre of the vault. He commended this respectful attention to those who could no longer enforce the claims of admiration or gratitude; but approbation was changed into horror and commiseration, when he discovered the person from whom this labour was exacted, — a miserable female, whose form indicated famine, while her countenance spoke that despair had suspended her toil at his entrance, and that she stood gazing on his features, till perceiving she had caught his attention, she raised her hands in a beseeching attitude, indicating, that she was apprehensive of increased punishment for this momentary indulgence.

The Earl, pointing to the woman, asked if this was a voluntary penance, or a penal

infliction. He was answered, that she was a shameless culprit, whom the justice of good Lady Margaret and holy Father Ambrose had sentenced to this task for seven years, when, if she survived, and professed contrition, she would be allowed to take the veil, among the sisters of Saint Clare. Were her miseries never intermitted? Never, except the few hours when she was allowed to repose in her dormitory, or during the time of divine worship, when she was admitted to the great aisle of the cathedral, and heard the priests sing the litanies. Further, on high festivals of the church, she was led to the adjoining nunnery, where lying down at the portal, the sisters spurned her with their feet, after which she was indulged with a small mess from the refectory. This was her only intercourse with human beings; at all other times her food was water, and the coarsest bread, and to offer her consolation, or

attempt to allay her sufferings, would incur the greater excommunication.

The Earl of Lancaster shuddered with horror, but inquired her name, and her crime. The canons of Wimborn answered, that relying on the justice and piety of the Countess and her confessor, they had not presumed to ask. The general opinion decided it was witchcraft, which she was believed still to practise in her subterraneous abode, for dreadful noises issued from the vaults, as if she drew the dead warriors from their coffins, and compelled them to fight with each other. Was she not young? Yes, under twenty. Again the Earl shuddered; it was the age of his own Countess, and he thought there was a resemblance in their persons. "Who," said he, "has power to remit this infernal sentence?" "The Earl of Salisbury for the time being, as paramount lord, can alone rescind the decree of our sovereign lady,

who by entering a convent has abrogated her natural right." By the death of De Lacy, and the deed of gift which accompanied his own marriage, vesting in himself the fee-simple of all his matrimonial earldoms, Lancaster was virtually Earl of Salisbury. "Be this then," said he, "the first exercise of my allodial rights!" and calling the miserable object before him, in the name of the All Merciful, he pronounced, that the miseries she had endured atoned for her crimes.

Either surprise at this unlooked for act of grace suspended her faculties, or the long horrors of her situation had produced temporary idiotism; fixed in a horrid stupor, Agatha remained motionless and incredulous, till the Earl repeated his assurances that she was liberated from all temporal punishment. Suddenly her bosom heaved tumultuously, her form became convulsed, and with a shriek, that sounded through the echoing caverns

of death, she asked, if he was the angel Michael, the subduer of Satan. Lancaster gravely answered that he was like herself, mortal, and a sinner. "And fear you not their thunderbolts?" said she, pointing to the regular canons of Wimborn, who stood at his side. The pitying Earl ordered that she should be fed, cloathed, and indulgently treated, and when her senses were restored, he would converse with her, and endeavour to render her fit for spiritual absolution. He then reproved the priests for their severity, who replied, that they were merely instruments in the hands of the Countess; and relating all they knew of the wretched Agatha's story, added, that her punishment would have been mitigated, but for her own obduracy, in refusing to recall the execrations she had uttered in her despair, and the Countess, attributing to these the premature death of her son, became inexorable.

"And would she mollify a hard heart," inquired the Earl, "by treating the body which contains it as if it were a block of marble? In old times, the intended sacrifice was not driven into the temple with scourges, but lured by minstrelsy, and crowned with flowers. How long shall man, when invested with accidental power, treat his fellow-mortal as a beast to bear his burdens, or a machine, to be impelled by his will?" Summoning Lady Margaret's confessor, he bade him carry back to that pious lady, from the man on whose bosom her husband expired, and her daughter reposed, a present, rare as the sacred relicks she had given him, namely, a handkerchief, wet with tears, forced from eyes unused to weep, on beholding the victim whom she immured to disturb her progenitors, and curse her descendants. Accustomed to improve every circumstance into a moral regulation for his own conduct, Lancaster,

while he reflected on the self-deceit of Lady Margaret, in calling herself just and devout, resolved to be more indulgent to the failings of Alicia, who, disgusted by her mother's morose, melancholy, and cruel inflexibility, suffered her vivacity and susceptibility to hurry her into the more amiable but dangerous extreme of irresolution and unbounded indulgence, not only of her own desires, but of the extravagance and indiscretion of her household.

To return to Agatha. Whether the merciless severity of her punishment had so inured her to the extremes of misery, as to render her soul callous to the call of contrition, and the claims of gratitude; or whether her temper was naturally of that base kind which clemency cannot correct, nor benevolence attach; after the first tumult of surprise subsided, the kindness of the Earl of Lancaster produced no sense of remorse, no wish for

conciliation. With a stern indifference to her future fortunes, she was only fixed in two points, to receive no favour from the son of Lady Margaret, except the natural right of liberty, and to cherish interminable revenge against the house of her persecutor. She would accept neither a purse nor a pension; she desired no reconciliation with the church; she rejected, with disdain, the offer of being married to her seducer; nor would she reside with an aged peasant, who promised to treat her as his daughter, nor enter into the sisterhood of Saint Clare. Standing in the presence of the princely Lancaster, she assumed a haughty air of equality, and only demanded to be left to herself, to repair her own marred fortunes. The chapter of Wimborn insisted that she ought to be confined in the convent of Black Penitents, as incorrigibly infamous; but the Earl thought she had suffered enough for her past crimes, and

reprobated the injustice of an anticipated punishment for those she was supposed to meditate. Agatha, therefore, was set at liberty, and by immediately disappearing, without permitting the inquisitive to discover the place of her retreat, confirmed the neighbourhood in the opinion, that she was a sorceress, deeply schooled in the same arts by which the mother of Gaveston had fascinated the King. Various reports were circulated respecting the shapes which she had assumed, and the mischiefs she had wrought, since her liberation; and prayers were offered at all the neighbouring crosses, to preserve the good Earl who took arms to break the spells of one enchantress, from being bewitched by another, and prevented from executing his purpose of making poor men rich, and England fruitful and prosperous.

CHAP. XVIII.

Our valuation shall be such,
That ev'ry slight and false derived cause,
Yea, ev'ry idle, nice, and wanton reason,
Shall to the King taste of this action;
That, were our royal faiths martyrs in love,
We shall be winnow'd with so rough a wind,
That ev'n our corn shall seem as light as chaff.

SHAKESPEARE.

ELATED by a popularity which had been most honourably acquired, superior to all sinister views, and too confident in his own strength to suppose himself capable of being misled by ambition, rashness, or revenge, Thomas Plantagenet, Earl of Lancaster, unfurled the banner of insurrection, ostensibly proclaiming his motives to be, the desire of fulfilling the dying commands of his uncle, and of liberating his cousin from ignominious thraldom. His own oath to

King Philip of France, was a further inducement to take arms, though respect for the Queen's confidence imposed silence on this head. Proceeding toward the north, with the vassals of Salisbury, he was joined by his chamberlain, Sir Robert Holland, who on this occasion had acted as his lieutenant, and collected the feudal retainers of the earldoms of Derby, Leicester, Lancaster, Lincoln, and Chester, to defend the liberty, and revive the glory of England. Thus, with almost half the force of the kingdom under his command, he seemed scarcely to require the assistance of other barons to surprise and subdue an indolent king and his unpopular minion. But though his allies were less powerful, they had been equally vigilant. Some, like himself, were actuated by sincere patriotism, and persuaded that the din of arms was the only lullaby to the cries of their country; others were invidiously jealous

of the rising strength of the lower orders, and fearful of the diminution of their own importance, by a closer connexion between the commons and the crown. Some persuaded themselves to think that they disliked tyranny and profusion, because they felt piqued at not being the dispensers of power and emolument; while others boldly disputed the bounds of the prerogative, and, denying the King's right to choose the great officers of state, substituted the rule of an overbearing aristocracy for universal freedom. But whatever was the chieftain's design, his conviction of the penalties annexed to rebellion forcibly impelled him to give efficiency to that struggle which posterity characterizes from its issue. The civic crown of the triumphant patriot, or the disjointed limbs of the condemned traitor, were full in the minds' eyes of the associated barons, to stimulate enterprize, and excite terror. Urged by these motives,

they were not satisfied with those forces which the prescribed regulations of military tenure assembled round their banners, but also called on the chartered towns which contained an independent commonalty, urging them to take arms. Conformably to the dying counsels of the Earl of Lincoln, in all their proclamations they preserved a personal respect for the King, who was described as well disposed to his subjects, and worthy of their exertions to free him from the evil influence of a man, to whom every public misfortune, and almost every individual calamity, was ascribed. Thus, while the populace were taught, that by rebellion they fulfilled their duty to their late sovereign, they were also led to expect from the death of Gaveston immunity from taxes, a flourishing commerce, and the suspension of physical as well as moral evils. By these means an overwhelming force was collected, and a

vindictive spirit inspired, of which even those who admitted the necessity deplored the misdirection; while the enemies of England rejoiced to see her consume those resources in civil discord, which might have secured her national independence.

It was impossible for King Edward to be ignorant of these preparations, though, instead of deliberating on some means of satisfying his nobles, or securing himself from their assaults, he minded nothing but to pursue his diversions at York, or to heap new favours on his minion, remaining in a state of surprising indolence, though he saw the whole kingdom ready to rise against him. He seemed to affect to act continually against his own interests, and to neglect to take such measures as a person of an ordinary understanding might have pointed out. While the glitter of his court was kept up by fops, and its gaiety by buffoons

and mimics of every description, he believed the foreign mercenaries, who were retained by Gaveston, would form a sufficient barrier to secure him from the portentous multitude inlisted on the side of the barons; and he even imagined himself to be in a condition to give laws to the insurgents, till his immediate residence was beleagured by the accumulating numbers of his foes. He then turned his eyes to look for friends, and made the lamentable discovery, that the summer flies of prosperity are scattered by the first blast of misfortune.

By the side of the King stood his now terrified favourite, his infant son, and his indignant Queen; the latter secretly rejoicing in her husband's difficulties, and meditating an escape to the lords of her own party, who would insure safety to herself and the young prince. The Bishop of Lichfield, and a few other churchmen and barons, who, next to Gaveston, were

the most obnoxious men in the kingdom, adhered to the royal cause, as the means of securing their own lives. The Earl of Gloucester, whose virtues would have reflected some popularity on his uncle the King, declined engaging in this contest, but kept his small force on the northern border to intimidate the Scots, as the truce made by the Earl of Lancaster was now expired. Surrey, and his brother-in-law Arundel, assembled their vassals, but seemed to waver as to their employment. The King reviewed his forces, but even his own besotted expectations could place no dependence on the feeble, disorderly, dispirited muster; he therefore fled—fled from his own subjects; but he fled with Gaveston, leaving his Queen, then in a situation which more tenderly demands a husband's solicitude, though she with tears implored him to preserve her from the apprehended insults of those outlaws and marauders,

who often precede or follow the course of a regular army, by placing her in some castle, where terms might be made which would prevent all hazard of personal indignity. Gaveston was all the King's care; all his solicitude was to place him in one of his strongest fortresses, and, as if his danger roused that dormant courage and capability of exertion, of which his excellent education and earlier years gave fair promise, he shook off the stupor that indolence and intemperance had engendered, and resolved to raise his banner in the centre of England, stake his own security, appeal to the affection that his subjects once bore him, and to their admiration of his father, and fight even to death for his crown, and for the preservation of the man whom, with lamentable pertinacity of affection, he still called his dearest friend.

Meantime the Earl of Lancaster occupied York, and pursuing the royal fugi-

tives, overtook the Queen at Tinemouth, whose person he deemed it expedient to secure. Though he treated her with all the respect due to her royal dignity, he declined any private interview which might tend to render his loyalty or her fame questionable. Sending her back with a guard to Wallingford, he waited to know which way the King had shaped his course, and soon learned that, after a short stay at Newcastle, he had gone by sea to Scarborough, in the castle of which town he deposited Gaveston, recommending him to the governor as a most precious trust, and sure pledge of royal confidence. Leaving him there, the King, with the rest of his evil counsellors, made a desperate push, and suddenly erecting the royal standard in Warwickshire, appeared before Kenilworth-castle, hoping, by its surprisal, to obtain possession of prisoners whose value would insure the safety of his friend. But while he was

thus engaged, the new-raised levies of the Earl of Pembroke, marching from the eastern side of Yorkshire, received information of the King's flight, and the place of Gaveston's retreat: thither they immediately proceeded, and commenced the siege of Scarborough with such vigour, that though the castle was one of the strongest in the kingdom, it was so ill provided against a fierce attack, that in a few days Gaveston was under a necessity of delivering himself into the hands of his enemies. He, however, obtained a capitulation, by which he was promised to be once more permitted to see the King, and that he should be tried by his peers, according to the laws of England.

With a constancy worthy a better object, the King omitted nothing which he thought could insure the safety of his friend. Before he left the north, he issued a proclamation, threatening with loss of life and possessions, all who should lay

violent hands on the Earl of Cornwall; but the powerless threat only excited the scoffs of the indignant lords. His menaced seizure of Kenilworth was resisted by the magnanimity of the Queen of Navarre, who, though in the last stage of a cruel disease, evinced a martial hardihood, which in those days was often combined with the softer virtues of the feminine character. As soon as she heard that her son's banner was erected in opposition to regal authority, she put her fortifications in a state of complete repair, summoned her vassals, and trained them to the use of arms; and when the King's forces appeared before her walls, she caused herself to be carried in a chair, and placed on the battlements. There she gave audience to the pursuivant, whom she prohibited from entering her gates, to take note of her means of defence. Peremptorily refusing to deliver the keys, she bade him go tell her kins-

man, the King, that if he forgot his duty to his subject, and his affection for his aunt, she remembered what she owed to her brother, her husband, and her son, from whom she received, and for whom she kept royal Kenilworth, where the enslaved dupe of a traitor Gascon should never enter but as her prisoner. And if, regardless of what he owed to a peer of his own blood, and in breach of his coronation oath, he dared to bring one of his war-wolves to batter the walls, she would hang the first prisoner she took on the highest pinnacle of her keep, even if signing his death-warrant was her last act. "And should I," continued she, "die during the siege, the keys of Kenilworth shall be buried in my coffin, and your master shall commit sacrilege, before he enters as a conqueror those gates which often seemed to open spontaneously to give the rites of hospitality to his father."

The newly-enkindled courage of the King was of too susceptible a nature to survive such a spirited rebuff, especially as at the same time he received intelligence that Gaveston was taken prisoner by the triumphant barons. To save his life was now all his care; and he instantly resolved to disband his forces, submit to the insurgents, and by entreaty and concession divert their fury from their intended victim. In a glossing harangue, which affected to refer his behaviour to clemency, and a desire of avoiding the waste of Christian blood, he thanked his friends for their services, and recommended to them a peaceable behaviour in their own houses, as the best way of promoting the welfare of his distracted kingdom; at the same time assuring them, that he would exert the utmost of his ability to procure an act of amnesty from the parliament, which the barons would require him to assemble. The chieftains

heard him with indignation, despising a prince whom it was glory to resist, and shame and danger to obey. Some of them were merely soldiers of fortune, attached to the royal cause by an expectation of the plunder they should gain by storming the castles, and wasting the lands of the confederated lords. To these Kenilworth appeared a tempting prize; and to be scared away without trying the chance of one assault, by the tongue-bravery of a woman, was insupportable to those who expected, from the then unsubdued license of war, a full indulgence to the fiends of lust, cruelty, and rapine. Some, in the distant view which they had taken of the magnificent pile, had selected the pinnacle, on which the Queen of Navarre's head might be fixed, a horrid and conspicuous beacon, illumined by the conflagration of the edifice. Others were casting lots who should first possess the fair daughter of De Lacy. Various

were the claimants for the arras-embroidery, plate, gold, and jewels, the collected heir-looms of Artois and Lancaster. And thus, after the King's departure, many a fierce adventurer remained with his discontented bands, murmuring at being dismissed to a life of inactivity, impatient to lay waste the country, and only wanting a leader as lawless and desperate as himself. A man of that stamp soon presented himself, in the person of Gondibert Fitz-allan, to whom the possession of Earl Maurice's heiress appeared a thing equally desirable and feasible. This bold libertine knew she had taken sanctuary at Balshall, and so peculiarly holy was that priory esteemed, that few native-born Englishmen would presume to violate its precincts. But among military adventurers, who have so long traded in blood as to have entirely deadened the natural feelings of pity; and who, with the distinction of home and country, have lost

the feeling of religious awe and respect for character, many outcasts of their native climates were to be found, on whom the sentence of excommunication could produce no effect, having committed too many secret murders to consider Christian burial as a necessary requiem, or to attach any value to the remissive sacraments: men who desired no viaticum, who hoped for no heaven, who scoffed at the name of hell, who almost ceased to fear the wandering spirits of those they had privily inhumed, and to disbelieve the existence of inquisitorial fiends and persecuting sorcerers. Men of this description despised the sacred immunities of Balshall, and were easily persuaded by Gondibert to tear the shrieking Matilda from that sanctuary, to insult the helpless nuns and their feeble dependants, to plunder the shrines and altars, and finally to invelope, with destructive flames, those

peaceful shades sacred to piety, contemplation, and charity.

The Earl of Lancaster at the same time received intelligence of the King's repulse at Kenilworth, and the violation of Balshall priory, which deed of bold impiety was falsely asserted to have been executed by royal command. If there was a man in England more particularly deserving pity, it was the enamoured, the distracted Guy de Beauchamp, meditating on the image of Matilda, perhaps the prey of brutal appetite; perhaps consumed by the remorseless flames in that pile where she vainly sought protection. He lacerated his arm with his own sword, tasted the blood, and, kneeling, swore nothing but the death of Gaveston should satiate his thirst for vengeance. He then sprang on his steed, ordered out his horsemen, and hastened to fulfil his vow.

In the mean-time the exemplary Walter

de Stapleton, Bishop of Exeter, who never quitted his King when in distress, nor misled him in his prosperity, arrived at Pembroke's camp, to intercede for the life of Gaveston, and know on what terms the peace of the kingdom might be restored. The Earl answered, that his plighted word prevented all apprehensions on the first account. The King might rest satisfied that his favourite was safe in the custody of an honourable baron, who would defend his life with his own, till he could be brought to a public trial. Among the spoils found at Scarborough were the royal regalia and crown-jewels; and by having these in his possession, Gaveston committed a crime for which perpetual imprisonment must be the slightest punishment. The good Bishop did not dissent from this conclusion, nor regret the consequence: he agreed with Pembroke, that the King should repair to his palace at Wallingford, whither

Gaveston should be conducted, and allowed that final interview, which was one of the conditions of his surrender. Here too the barons should also assemble, and after Gaveston had been tried by his peers, concert measures for the restoration of tranquillity. With these promises the Bishop returned to the King.

Previous to the exasperating intelligence which Lancaster had lately received, he and the associated lords who were with him, loudly expressed their disapprobation of the terms granted to Gaveston, especially to the indulgence of again admitting him into the royal presence. What end could it answer? Was it to confirm his influence, or to heighten the regret of that eternal separation which was essential to the preservation of the tottering throne? Had not the most solemn obligations often proved nugatory? Was banishment of any avail? Did honour, conscience, peace, security, fame,

influence the versatile monarch? Seas were fordable, absolution was easily procured from Rome, and the King of England stood released from all obligations to his people, with the Gascon at his side, who, like a foul sorcerer, could post from any quarter of the globe, break every chain, surmount every barrier; and when he was supposed to be in durance at the bottom of the Red Sea, flash like a portentous meteor on their blasted sight. Each chief asked his compatriot if there were no means of fixing this active spirit, and the same answer was given by all, that there was a dungeon, and its keeper was called Death. But the Earl of Pembroke was too powerful as a confederate, and had gained too much glory in terminating the war by seizing its object, to be offended with impunity. Though from his avaricious temper it was feared he would turn the prize he possessed to his private advantage, yet, since he insisted

on being allowed to fulfil the conditions he had made, they must rely on his word to produce his prisoner for trial, whenever he was so required. But the flagitious outrage at Balshall, which (with the pitiable responsibility of sovereign power compelled to answer personally for the misuse of its authority) was referred to the King, irritated even the Earl of Lancaster to the most intemperate rage, and the universal cry was Vengeance!

On the first intimation of the King's erecting his standard in Warwickshire, a detachment was sent under the Earl of Hereford to pursue his steps, and frustrate his views. He was soon followed by the General, and the rest of the army, who now received intelligence that the Earl of Pembroke had already conducted his prisoner to the bounds of Oxfordshire to meet the King. The impetuous Warwick demanded that the task of reclaiming Gaveston should be his. The only

attendance he required was a band of light armed troopers; for Pembroke, relying on the honour of his associates, and knowing that the King had no means to attempt a rescue, travelled with a slight guard. He had proceeded as far as Deddington, where, leaving Gaveston to the charge of his servants, he went to visit his lady, who resided in the neighbourhood: but hardly had he quitted his post when the furious Beauchamp darted like an eagle on his prey, and hewing down all opposition with his broad-sword, seized the now suppliant but formerly arrogant intruder, bound him on a horse, and, with every mark of vengeance and derision, carried him to his own castle, from whence, after the mockery of a summary trial, he was speedily removed to suffer death on Blacklow-hill, amid the acclamations of rejoicing thousands, without one friend to pity his distress, or hear his parting words, and scarce allowed

the decency of a priest to shrive and prepare his agitated soul for its fearful and unexpected summons.

This murder was sanctioned by the presence of the Earl of Lancaster, who interfered no further than that the sentence should be mercifully executed. "A mad act, violating a capitulation, trampling upon the laws of the land, and the respect at all times due from subjects to sovereigns, and the more to be condemned as being committed by those who were associated to preserve the lives and liberties of their fellow-creatures.*" To this reflection of the dispassionate historian, others have added the record of an act singularly visited by retributive justice, in the long series of calamities which fell on those whose authority might have prevented the bloody deed. Thus at last was sacrificed, illegally and rashly, a man whose whole life presented a tissue of injustice and presumption, who never made nor

* Rapin.

deserved a friend, and yet, by the manner of his death, brought odium and misfortune on those who, till then, ranked highest in the admiration of their country; and even when in his grave, he seemed to possess a fatal power of disturbing the repose of the realm, and fomenting that bitter feud between the King and the barons which his folly and ambition had enkindled. Shall we pause a moment, to warn the possessor of convivial talents from daring to undertake the management of empires; or shall we moralize on the hard terms by which royalty purchases faithful subjects and able servants, namely, an interdiction of indulging the preference which arises from correspondent tastes and reciprocal inclinations; all the partiality of spontaneous affection; perhaps, too, all the exclusive confidence and solacing immunities of friendship? Comparing the lot of the subject, rich in his domestic and social ties, and happy in the liberty of

choice, with the victim or the slave of royalty, the King who must not love and the dependent to whom favour is danger, should not those who tread "the cool sequestered vale of life," look with pity and indulgence on the insulated inhabitants of its lofty eminences, who have neither shade from the sun nor shelter from the storm?

Though the strong, deep feelings of the genuine Englishman may be wrought upon to do a deed of desperation in a moment of frenzy, deliberate cruelty is incongruous with the national character. The blood of Gaveston flowed on the scaffold, and the feelings of animosity were instantly extinguished: the lifeless head rolled in the dust, and those who loudest arraigned the supposed sorcery of his mother, and his rapacity and ambition, were silent, like his own presumptuous boastings and offensive insolence. The severest charges now brought against

him were those of rashness and vanity: it was admitted that he was young, handsome, accomplished, witty and brave. Many, with a sigh, hoped that they should now see happier times. The Earl of Lancaster prayed God to rest his soul: Hereford, in a faultering voice, added, Amen. Warwick, alone, continued inexorable; but he was thinking of Matilda, of whose fate, while he pursued Gaveston, he could learn no tidings. From the scaffold of the victim to his misdirected rage, he hastened to the still smoaking ruins of Balshall, to shed, on the spot where he believed the beloved of his heart had terminated her life, or commenced her miseries, those tears which the miserable end of Gaveston seemed to require, but which none but Matilda's sorrow should receive.

While Lancaster was reflecting on the fearful consequences of this deed to his own safety, his reputation, and the re-

pose of England, he was summoned to attend the death-bed of his mother. He resigned his command to the Earl of Hereford, who undertook to pacify Pembroke, and assemble the barons at Wallingford. It was necessary they should there meet in military array, as they did not dare to trust implicitly to the safe conduct previously promised by their now exasperated King, whose cause would, probably, be reinforced by the secession of those nobles who disapproved the execution of his favourite. With a heart sorely foreboding future miseries, and pained by the novel and insupportable feeling of self-reproach, the Earl of Lancaster proceeded to his own castle. The situation of his young bride rendering it improper for her to be exposed to the horrors of the expected siege, Queen Blanche had sent her, with a strong escort, to her own demesne of Canford, as soon as it was rumoured that the King meant to

attack Kenilworth. The intercourse between these noble ladies had been too short to excite imitation, or create affection. Blanche saw that her daughter-in-law was gay and beautiful, accustomed to ease, admiration, and indulgence; and Alicia beheld in the aged Queen a form withering in the grasp of sickness, yet preserving a complacent dignity, that required her to believe the filial reverence of her son was a tribute justly due to pre-eminent desert. But unhappily she had been too little accustomed to hear the harp of eulogy tuned to the praise of any beside herself, to render the consciousness of superiority grateful. While she seemed to listen to the reported munificence and self-denial of the royal dowager, her promised adoption of the virtues of Blanche and Eleanora changed to projects for giving eclat to the coronet of Lancaster, by means which these illustrious friends had never pursued. This she purposed to do

as soon as peaceable times allowed her to wear the coronet in unveiled splendor. For the return of those times she felt a feverish impatience, considerably augmented by her strong affection for her lord. But while she prided herself on his popularity, and anticipated an increase of happiness from his triumphs, she girlishly grieved that they could not be obtained without the distasteful concomitants of danger and difficulty, those heaven-appointed harbingers of glory. As in the court of Queen Isabella she desired to revel in pleasure without feeling satiety, and to attract admiration without exciting envy, now, as the wife of a princely captain, she required that her hero should walk to fame through a flowery path, beside the still waters of comfort. Disappointed in either view, she peevishly complained that she had fallen on evil times, or to speak more truly, that she was invested with that nature whose out-

ward condition may be called a patchwork of cloth of frieze and cloth of gold. The occasional convictions produced by her lord's counsels were prevented from ripening into an improving sense of self-humiliation and gratitude for undeserved favours, by the flatteries of her attendants, and the pliability of her confessor. She was daily told, that since her marriage her husband had been too often called from her to form a due estimate of her worth, or he would never have proposed his antiquated mother for her example, or increased her too keen sensibility for omitting some duties, by one reproachful look. He intimated, that amiable tenderness was want of fortitude; but some lords, when their gentle ladies implored permission to follow them to the wars, granted the request of love, and by making their preservation the meed of valour, and the reward of enterprize, allowed them to gain glory without incurring

danger. Thus acted the twelve peers of France, who always laid the heads of the giants they cut off at the feet of the fair damsels who rode about with them in search of adventures, filling Christendom with the fame of their beauty, and the deeds of their paladins. But the Earl of Lancaster had, for a knight, a strange aversion to camps and courts. He had cropped a bud from the stem of the world's much-celebrated rose; and he wished it to wither in a solitary castle, or to mildew in a conventual cell, as if any heart could be found sufficiently depraved to violate its freshness. Thus daily schooled, Alicia found the task of moderating her desires, and searching out her faults, difficult and disgusting, and the imitation of the sister-queens was a work of supererogation to one who was already perfect. These thoughts gathered strength when, after the bloodless dispersion of the King's forces, and her own distance

from danger, she had leisure in her castle of Canford, in the absence of real evils, to conjure up numberless imaginary wants; and like all those conjugal reveries which do not start from a modest opinion of our own deserving, and a candid indulgence for the infirmities of our partners, her investigation terminated in a suspicion that her princely lord had too much of the austerity of the monk, and too little of the gallantry of the knight in his composition. Thus the susceptible heart and inventive fancy of woman often converts leisure and solitude into the bane of its repose, by magnifying trivial difficulties and creating imaginary evils, while active man is enabled to drive from his remembrance the deepest sorrows, by being compelled to be a busy actor instead of a silent mourner.

The mind of the Queen of Navarre was of a masculine character: the defence of her castle seemed to suspend

the sense of pain; and the honour of intimidating her enemies without shedding their blood, almost banished from her thoughts the certainty of her approaching death. The heart which is least disposed to self-pity, has the more space and leisure for universal benevolence, or the peculiarities of endeared affection. When exhausted nature sunk under the pressure of disease, it was only her apprehensions for Matilda, and her anxiety for her sons, that disturbed the serene fortitude which, during a long life, marked the illustrious mother of Lancaster. It was known that Gondibert Fitz-allan led the band of depredators to Balshall; and the lovely orphan was reported to have been seen in his possession after the destruction of the monastery. Queen Blanche instantly issued orders to her troops to pursue the ravisher; and sent a pursuivant to the Earl of Arundel, threatening him that she would lay waste his lands if he did

not instantly restore her ward. Feeling death approach, she sent for her son, to charge him to add the seizure of Matilda to those wrongs his sword must redress; and to communicate a fear which the only unadvised action of his life had deeply imprinted on her heart.

As the Earl of Lancaster obeyed the call of his revered parent, he was accosted, on his way to Kenilworth, by a gallant youth, in a helm and surcoat, who greeted him with a fraternal embrace, and claimed his cordial congratulations on his return to England. It was Henry Plantagenet, Earl of Leicester, who hearing that the barons of England had risen in military array, quitted the restorative baths of Avignon; and having received knighthood from his kinsman the King of France, came to England to share the dangers and glories of his brother. He was also hastening to implore the blessing of his dying mother; yet though filial

piety urged him to confine his thoughts to that solemn meeting, the events of the preceding day directed them to a topic on which it was ecstacy to expatiate. This was the rescue of Matilda, the first achievement of his newly-received knighthood, and the blood of Gondibert flesh'd his maiden sword. The tale was long, if circumstantially related, but the occasion which called them to spur their steeds to Kenilworth confined Leicester to a brief account; in which he rather dwelt on the deserts and distress of Matilda, and the sacrilege and baseness of Gondibert, than on the gallantry of attacking a force treble their numbers; or the adroitness with which himself and his armed servitors charged the ravishers, and rescued the lady whom they were bearing to Wallingford to extort from the King his mandate for marriage, which was then esteemed a justification of all prior violence, and would have authorized

Gondibert to take possession of her lands. The frank-hearted Leicester, elated by success, ingenuously avowed, that he was not a disinterested champion; but Lancaster's thoughts were too painfully occupied to attend to love-tales; and Matilda's looks testified that she scarcely enjoyed her recovered freedom. She said her tears flowed for her most kind guardian, for the danger of her venerable maternal friend; but her eyes asked, Why was not Warwick her deliverer? Why did her plighted champion leave her to be rescued by another? Was he indeed not only a recreant knight, but a perjured lover, whose passion died with the difficulties it had subdued?

But the party were now at the gates of Kenilworth. The improved health and return of Leicester, added to the rescue of Matilda, composed the anguish of the dying Queen, who raised herself in her bed to bestow the benediction, which was

then deemed peculiarly efficacious, and almost prophetical. That duty performed, she dismissed all but Lancaster, whom she retained to receive her last instructions. In part they related to Matilda, adjuring him, by all the honourable motives which first prompted her spontaneous protection of orphan-innocence, to maintain the freedom of her nuptial choice, even in defiance of the solicitations of fraternal affection; yet still to deal tenderly with his enamoured brother, remembering that there is an age, when the unripe judgment dares not attempt to lead the heart out of the labyrinth of love.

"Thomas of Lancaster," continued the Queen, laying her cold hand on her son's, "trust not Edward of Carnarvon; I will not die reproving the illustrious first-born Heaven gave to my prayers; but on Blacklow-hill stands a mound, which royal forgiveness will never over-

leap. A king's revenge will not be glutted by the sacrifice of mean instruments, for the lion will not prey on carcases. Either law must be further violated, and a curb invented strong enough to bind majesty, or the knell of Gaveston will be echoed in a death-peal from the turrets of Kenilworth. Many a brave heart shall quail, and many a noble head lie low, ere the base mind, daily accustomed to palter with justice, shall forget the sudden irritation of mistaking virtue, and say to revenge, "stay thy ravages."

CHAP. XIX.

I pr'ythee, loving wife ———
Give even way unto my rough affairs.
Put not you on the visage of the times.
SHAKESPEARE.

AFTER the funeral of his mother, the Earl of Lancaster proceeded to Canford-castle, to recommend Matilda to the friendship of Alicia; and to find that solace in his wife's society which his griefs, his apprehensions, his cares, and his self-reproaches required. She had promised that she would commune with her own heart, and govern her conduct by the most approved models. Even in a worldly point of view rigorous self-government is useful, since it sharpens and exercises those faculties, which lie

dormant during a state of indulgence and uninterrupted prosperity. He remembered that in every difficulty which disturbed his father's repose, the high-minded princess, over whose grave the requiem of peace had just been sung, proved at once a comfort and a counsellor; and he well recollected the wisdom and courage of her interference, when, joining two sister-queens, she mediated between the crowns of France and England, and suspended the horrors of war. Perhaps he also might find his cares relieved, and his difficulties lightened by domestic participation; at least in one instance he might depend on kind assistance from a female mind, more conversant in the delicate management of the tender passions, than that sex who are daily called to witness the effect of impetuous desires. For that knowledge of Matilda's inclinations, which would enable him to fulfil his mother's will, he should

depend on his consort. But after Alicia's first transports at their re-union subsided, Lancaster found that she had too many cares and sorrows of her own to be a successful mitigator of his. She was on the eve of her first confinement, capricious, fretful, and terrified. Unused to privations or sufferings, and led, by the errors of her early training, and the servility of her associates, to forget that, at the entrance and exit of life, nature's commoners must submit to the same law of equality, yet ashamed that the lady of the castle should appear to want that fortitude, which the wife of the meanest sesf practised, Alicia tried to refer her restlessness to some extraneous circumstance. Latterly it was the absence of her lord, but since his return had not made her happy and tranquil, whence could her continued dissatisfaction arise? Doubtless from perceiving that he was melancholy; perhaps also, as Beatrice in-

sinuated, at his unreasonableness, in supposing that she could undertake the charge of a young heiress, and assist to dispose of her in marriage, while every one's thoughts ought to be occupied on her own situation, which should almost (as her ladies hinted) suspend public transactions. Though Alicia's real affection for her lord made her reject, with some slight indication of displeasure, every compliment that was paid her at his expence, yet the fretfulness which misdirected sensibility and servile adulation necessarily engendered, was so unpleasant an inmate to an affectionate heart, that she was glad to divert her quarrel with herself, by finding something objectionable in her husband, and ventured to reprove him for being dispirited. Had he not delivered England from a pest? Was not the end for which he had taken up arms accomplished, and the King at once humbled and miserable? A sick

matron like her might, nay must, be miserable, but joy and triumph became a conqueror.

When the Earl of Lancaster relinquished his expectation of finding in his consort a solace to his cares, he recollected his resolution to respect her susceptibility, and knew it was not now the time to alarm her with fears for his safety. Yet while he buried in his bosom his mother's apprehensions and his own, he considered an avowal of the fault which he had committed at once requisite as a penance, and instructive as a lesson. He replied, that England was indeed delivered from a pest, and the object for which they had taken up arms accomplished, yet could he not be called a conqueror, who, in a public, an important, and an atrocious act, had been the slave of his own passions; at whose impulse he unworthily accomplished an end, which might have been attained by means alike

holy with that end. While generalissimo of the barons of England, leagued to support liberty and confirm law, he had violated the sanctity of an oath; broken a ratified convention; and, by robbing justice of her forms, turned her sword into an assassin's dagger. Thus had he added to the horrors of the times, by abating the confidence man places in man, defrauding peace of its security, and war of the alleviations which honour affords. He could not say he had shed innocent blood; but, substituting blind vengeance for impartial rectitude, he had sacrificed a villain for a crime of which he was necessarily innocent. To the world he must still preserve an imposing aspect, but to his faithful partner he would own, that by doing an action unworthy a Christian knight, his banner was riven on the grave of Gaveston; who, though abhorred in his life, must be pitied in his end. As to humbling

the King, or seeking to make him miserable, it was what a faithful subject must ardently deprecate. His dearest wish was to be restored to his friendship, and to spend his life in his service. These were his sorrows; and he left it to her to judge how far a sick matron's cares and fears preponderated against them.

While Lancaster indulged these self-reproachful meditations, the confederated barons, who were less implicated in the death of Gaveston, or less disposed to scrutinize the means by which he had been cut off, resolved to avail themselves of the advantages obtained over the King, and marched to London, determined to demand a renewal of the terms formerly granted at Wallingford, which assigned the government of the kingdom to a council of their appointment. The Earl of Gloucester, and the Bishop of Exeter, again assumed the character of mediators; and though the claims on either side

looked irreconcilable, there was a mutual consciousness of weakness which forwarded the labours of the pacificators. The barons knew, that to have appeared in open insurrection is a less favourable situation than merely to menace resistance; in the latter case the desire to prevent extremities, and the magnifying apprehensions of an untried strength, may induce a prince to conciliate; in the former, offended royalty remembers those as enemies who have done their worst, and may demand conditions as an equivalent for that pardon, on which they must depend for a restitution of the lands forfeited by rebellion. On these accounts it was finally arranged, that the royal prerogative should have ampler limits than the convention at Wallingford permitted. The ordainers were changed to a council, whose advice would be less imperative than commands, reserving to the King the liberty of refusing to sanction their

measures, though he was still restrained from acting without their coincidence. The barons on their part agreed, to restore the spoils they had taken with Gaveston as part of the royal treasures, publicly to implore pardon on their knees in Westminster-hall, in submissive terms, and to receive it as an act of pure mercy and favour.

It seemed as if the nobles had now discovered that, when royalty is brought into contempt, the nation partakes in the degradation of the sovereign. In the present agreement much attention was paid to the dignity of his person and office, and an attempt was made to influence his weakness by the way of adroit management, avoiding all appearance of rude coercion. It was seen that the King could not exist without a confidential friend, or rather a favourite companion, whose wit would supply amusement, and pleasantly divert those regrets which it

would now be dangerous for him to indulge. A young nobleman was selected for this office, namely, Hugh Spenser, son to a venerable and patriotic baron, in whom the most agreeable qualities were united to a strong understanding and honourable principles. He was introduced to the King as his chamberlain; and being thus fixed about his person, was directed by his party to use the influence he was expected to acquire, in keeping Edward a passive instrument in the hands of his council. Their first measure after a general amnesty would be the vigorous prosecution of the Scottish war. Such was the plan; but cherished by royal favour, the undiscovered seeds of ambition redolently expanded in the mind of this selected and entrusted guardian of aristocratical pre-eminence, the fruits of which were treachery to his friends, and destruction to himself.

Though Edward was incapable of a steady course of action, his heart was adapted to form lasting attachments. His love for the friend and companion of his youth was indelible; and the manner of his being cut off sunk so deep into his memory, as to change his open, placable disposition, into a deep, insatiable, but concealed, thirst for revenge, on those who had deprived him of his treasure, especially on the Earls of Lancaster and Warwick, who instigated and sanctioned the execution. As he abstained from all public signs of sorrow, the well-wishers to England augured favourably, from the composure with which their sovereign appeared to endure the personal insult he had sustained in his favourite's death; and when they saw him willingly agree to the terms the Earl of Gloucester had procured, and gracefully pardon the suppliant barons, they trusted a happier era had commenced. "The spell," said

they, "is broken; the King's mind has recovered its freedom; we shall again be an united, powerful, martial nation." Still, however, the publication of the amnesty was delayed, under frivolous pretences; and though passports were refused to the Earls of Lancaster and Warwick, the King complained, with affected astonishment, of the distrust of those noblemen, in refusing to attend his court and parliament. Whom did they suspect? What cause had they for fear? Why then keep up the array of their vassals, and fortify their castles? The manner of the King, as he made these complaints, induced the friends of these barons to advise them to remain aloof, till his disposition towards them could be more accurately discovered.

It was not wholly from a conviction that they must be peculiarly obnoxious to their prince, that Lancaster and his

friend Warwick withdrew from public affairs. The rash deed they had committed, fostered a host of enemies. The Earl of Gloucester, whose moderation and popularity expedited the pacification, could not, while his brother-in-law lay "yet green in death," act publickly with those who had cut him off; and he was now required to consider his sister as the widowed Countess of Cornwall, not as the neglected wife of an unworthy husband. Pembroke, too, though with a right English feeling he said he would not bring the account of his own wrong to increase the sum of public distraction, sullenly brooded over the injuries his honour had received, and declared, when he next forfeited his lands by rebellion, that it should be with confederates who would allow him to fulfil the capitulations he granted. To court myrmidons, the spirit of a Beauchamp, and the integrity

of a Lancaster were peculiarly obnoxious. The Queen's party disliked every man of abilities, who threatened to interfere with their design of governing the kingdom by her influence; and there are grounds to apprehend that the passion of Mortimer, which afterwards ripened into the bitter fruits of treason, adultery, and murder, had already so far departed from the pure gallantry which chivalry not only sanctioned, but required, as to induce him to look, with personal dislike, on the Earl of Lancaster, whom Isabella sometimes honoured with the highest encomiums, and at others, petulantly complained that the wayward girl, whom she once esteemed her friend, had made him not only an ungallant monitor but her inflexible enemy. To Mortimer, therefore, Lancaster's return to London was portentous; and the Queen, more mortified at the ill success of her blandishments than grateful for his services

or valuing his fidelity, seemed unwilling that the English court should contain two men whom she could not fashion to her will; and (as is ever the case) even among those who, while they are ostensibly leagued together as the champions and assertors of freedom, thunder out invectives against ambition, treachery, selfishness, and all that invidious baseness and intriguing cabal which they describe as the rank growth of courts—even there, though bound by solemn engagements to stand or fall with his fortunes, jealous of the preponderance of the general whom they had chosen, or desirous of exonerating themselves from blame,—were those who asked what had the great Earl of Lancaster and his bosom friends effected? Did Plantagenet, Bohun, and Beauchamp unfurl their standards to crush an unresisting, though detestable foe, by a deed as detestable? When he had provoked the King beyond forgiveness,

should he not have followed up the blow, and by another decisive act prevented his colleagues from being compelled to sue for mercy, and considered as pardoned rebels by their ill-appeased prince? Thus every party in the state appeared to unite in driving from its councils the only man, who, by his power and integrity, could consolidate the energies, and revive the spirit of a divided and degraded nation.

But though such were the feelings of the courtiers, the populace, who had been taught to ascribe all their miseries to the King's favourite, with whom accusation is proof, and who are too impetuous and unreflecting to consider that the way by which their supposed enemy was removed, implicated the safety of every man in England, and being also dazzled by the reported munificence and sanctity of Lancaster, turned their previous admiration into idolatry. The first question which was put to tra-

velling minstrels at wakes and bridals, was, " Have you any new ditty about the good Earl Thomas of Lancaster, who expends the revenues of five earldoms upon the church and the poor?"

" Would to heaven," another artizan would observe, " he were our King; then labour might sleep over his leathern bottle, and care sing under the village oak, during the longest summer's day!"

" Heaven," said a third, " hath already blessed him with such measureless content, that I question whether a crown would make him happier. He is rich enough to feed on pearls and diamonds, and what he wills the King dare not gainsay. His fair wife has just brought him a hopeful son, and he has nothing now to ask of his patron saint, but health and length of days to enjoy his marvellously happy fortunes."

When the splendid pall is removed, with

which those who are prudent as well as prosperous envelope the ghastly spectre which silently paces by the side of temporal greatness, envy and admiration must alike start surprized at beholding the object of their malignity, or the theme of their adulation, such a being as themselves, alternately goaded by care, and depressed by disappointments! Though the Earl of Lancaster, like many wise men, had mistaken the attractions of beauty for moral perfection, he knew his own temper, when he said that he was not suited to humour the caprices, or correct the petulance of his wedded partner. Conscious of his own quick sensibility and jealous honour, he endeavoured to divert his attention from what he could not but condemn, especially while his own regrets and cares were so numerous, and her state required peculiar tenderness. And when he afterwards saw his child recline upon her

bosom, he gazed on the infant's charms, and invented palliatives for the mother's failings. The burst of sensibility and joy which overwhelmed her, when he first blessed the gift she had bestowed, and prayed for it's life and for her's, assured him that it was not from an incapacity of feeling that Alicia so often forgot the duties which she owed to others. He saw she doated on the infant; surely the maternal character would, in time, enlarge her social virtues. Blanche of Navarre had often said that her love to her family made her pious, just, and benevolent. The bright model which he wished his wife to copy was removed, by death, to her native region, and the turbulent times would often separate him from his domestic superintendence, as well as his domestic comforts; but would not their young Edmund be the conservator of his mother's virtues, and the corrector of her failings? With

talents of the first order, much intrinsic worth, and the liveliest susceptibility of what was excellent, would she not aspire to minister to the rational as well as the animal wants of the high-born infant, to render him the meet representative of his princely ancestors? and could the precepts of true nobility be inculcated, and the example be withheld? Could a woman of acute feeling and strong discrimination, allow herself to be wayward, or indulge in unseemly levity, while an intelligent child witnessed those actions, which, if he copied, would plant eternal scorpions in her own heart? Consumed by fears and regrets which he could neither subdue nor dismiss, the Earl of Lancaster endeavoured to hope, that some happy contingency would eventually remove the minute but piercing thorns that were concealed in his nuptial chaplet, without his tearing them out

with what he, from his self-knowledge, foreboded would be a destructive hand!

We must now explain the nature of those fears and regrets which disturbed the saint, and unmanned the hero. The Earl of Lancaster was alike virtuous and enlightened; but we must only seek in him the intelligence and virtue of the century in which he flourished. Betrayed by a sudden start of passion, he had dipped his hands in blood! The guilt, though not the danger annexed to murder, lay upon him, and that guilt he must expiate. His friends had forewarned him to beware of the King's vengeance; from that he could secure himself by abiding in his own castles, where the array of his vassals would repel violence, while their fidelity would secure him from those insidious attacks to which revenge too often resorted. But where was the preservative which would make the thunders of the church

fall harmless, should its anathemas be pointed at him by a pontiff fattening on the spoils that an imbecile King permitted him to reap from England? At a period when the nation had been trained to throw off the papal yoke, Edward of Caernarvon allowed the fetters his father's wisdom had gradually loosed to be again rivetted. The statute of mortmain was infringed; investitures to bishopricks came from Avignon, where the Pope then resided; and whenever the King wished to falsify his oaths to his subjects, absolutions and indulgences travelled by the same courier that brought claims for Peter's-pence and first-fruits. As foremost of that distinguished band of nobles who, in the late reign, asserted the independence of the Anglican church, Lancaster was peculiarly obnoxious to the Pope; for the devotion and munificence of the man could not atone for the inflexibility of

the patriot. The King and the pontiff had mutually bandied the ball of acquiescence; the former agreed, that some indolent foreign priests should be installed in a rich English benefice, and the latter permitted the Bishop of Lichfield, a royal favourite and his nuncio, to excommunicate the Earls of Lancaster and Warwick, for conspiring the death of the Earl of Cornwall.

To the firmest minds and bravest hearts, and even to those also who, by practical infidelity, seemed to be exonerated from all spiritual terrors, the anathema of the church was, at this period, most tremendous: it dissolved all civil and social ties, and excluded its victim, not only from the least sacred offices of church-communion, but also from the comforts of domestic life. The nearest and strongest ties of love and affinity were broken, and the interdicted wretch was doomed to exist on the same

terms as an out-law, who had been cut off by a civil process from all intercourse with his fellow-creatures. Such were the consequences of this dreadful sentence; and though the bold spirit of independence, which they felt as peers and Englishmen, induced the Earls to despise the fulminations of the Bishop of Rome, and to deny his authority as universal pontiff, yet, when on applying to their respective confessors, with consciences laden with sad misgivings, arising from a sense that the weight of blood lay on their souls, their ghostly father shrunk from their request, refused to listen to their confession, and withheld the remissive sacraments, they also trembled. The Roman hierarchy, like the military tenures of the ages in which its preponderance was acquired, was one firm compacted system, extending from the lowly village pastor and ignorant monk, through every rank of secular and regu-

lar clergy, till it terminated in the presumptuous priest who claimed to be the vicegerent and representative of the Deity, and whose mandate, of course, claimed implicit obedience from all the clergy in Christendom; they depending on him not only for their future advancement, but for permission to exercise their sacerdotal functions.

The Earl of Lancaster, alike serious and devout, deeply imbued with a sense of the shortness of life, and of the importance of religious rites, shuddered at the possibility of being summoned to the bar of his Maker, while he was at enmity with the visible church. Banishment from its courts was to him the most dolorous exile. He had willingly relinquished the splendour and amusements common to his station, and even when imperatively compelled by his exalted birth to sanction a festive scene by his presence, the sackcloth which he wore

under his robes of state continually reminded his unsubjugated heart of his vowed renunciation of wealth, power, and voluptuousness. In the latter he had sworn never to indulge, and only to employ the two former for the benefit of others. His desire to promote the welfare and secure the liberties of England, was his only motive for wishing to mingle in the busy haunts of active life. His return to the senate or the council, had been rendered not only personally unsafe but inefficacious by that bloody precipitation which had offended and divided his associates, and converted the sovereign, whom he might have influenced, into an implacable enemy. But these comfortless reflections were all absorbed in the super-eminent horrors of the imposed malediction. Neither peer nor legislator could act in concert with an excommunicated person. To him no social worship, no

religious consolation could be afforded. Nor fortified bulwarks, nor the right to summon a third of the kingdom to follow his banner, were now of any avail! Not even the peculiar resources of his birth, his character, or his moral qualities, could render the great Earl of Lancaster invincible to the terrors of a punishment which loosened his wife from her connubial bond, and his vassals from their conditions of servitude, deposed him from that empire over the multitude which the sanctity of his character had acquired, estranged him from the protection of the law, and, in the event of his obduracy, licensed the dagger of the assassin, or the cup of the poisoner, by directing them to a victim whose death would not be questioned by a legal process. Yet further, this sentence, in case of his demise, consigned his soul "unhousell'd, unannointed,

unaneal'd," not only to the penal fires of purgatory, but to those hopeless realms of ever-during torment, in which, according to the creed of those times, obstinate resisters of the authority of holy church, must sustain pre-eminence in misery.

Such then was the situation of the Earls of Lancaster and Warwick; and never had the thunders of popery been launched against two more high-minded and yet susceptible offenders; for while piety and patriotism awoke the fears and deepened the regrets of Lancaster, Warwick felt the misery of love suspended, at the moment when it seemed to attain fruition. His happiness had been confirmed by the conduct of Henry Plantagenet, who, alike generous and brave, as soon as he learned the state of Matilda's affections, refused to advance any plea on the score of his own services or his mother's protection, but nobly imposed an eternal silence on

his long-cherished passion. He went yet further, and requested his brother immediately to acquit himself of the trust devolved upon him, by bestowing his lovely ward on the faithful knight who possessed her heart. Lancaster doubted the sincerity of a proposal which contradicted the account he had heard of his long-cherished attachment; and when he cast a scrutinizing glance on his brother, as if he questioned his power of exerting the fortitude he professed, young Leicester bravely answered, "Fear me not, I too am a Lancastrian, and claim a share in that royal blood which runs in your veins. By the soul of my mother! I will not waste that health and strength, for which I believe myself indebted to her merits and prayers, in pining for a fair maiden who has preferred a pavilion to an hospital, a blooming courtier to a wasted invalid. I have long been chained to the bed of infirmity,

a burthen on my fellow-creatures, whose services I am now called upon to repay with usury. I will begin my career with an energy which shall supply unavoidable lapses. The world has various novelties to engage my attention, business to occupy my industry, and rewards to stimulate my ambition. I am called by my birth to act a conspicuous part on a vast theatre, before an innumerable auditory; and if England never shews me a lady so fair and good as the sweet playmate of my infancy, I will make no woman wretched by my preference for Beauchamp's wife, but will adopt one of your children as my own son, and train him to inherit my earldoms. And if age itself cannot scare from my mind the image of Matilda, when I find I can serve the world no longer, I will become a hermit beadsman, and pray for her and her posterity."

The only impediment having been thus

removed, Lancaster had consented to bestow his adopted sister on his friend. Nor did Matilda affect those doubts and coynesses to which her heart was a stranger. Rejoicing in the prospect of exchanging alarm and dependence for the full security, the serene content, and the mild authority, which is the noble matron's portion when happily united to a worthy and beloved lord, she modestly acceded to the suit of Beauchamp, granted an early day, and joyfully prepared to lay aside the simplicity of her maid's attire, to assume the more splendid, but decorous garb, which was then the appropriated costume of wedded beauty.

Ease and luxury had not at this time proclaimed an universal gala, even in the mansions of opulence. The great festivals of the church, and the peculiar ceremonials of religion, were observed as seasons of convivial hilarity, relaxing the toil of labourers and artizans, by summon-

ing them and their families to the mansion of their feudal lord, where the lady of the castle, laying aside her needle and her distaff, received her guests of every degree, smoothing the inequality of condition with a dignity which awed while it delighted, and forbade familiarity though it created attachment. Admitted not only to behold, but to partake of their lord's opulence, guests at his table and attendants on his sports, the meanest hind, by thus occasionally conversing with gallant knights and gentle dames, imbibed, with some portion of their courtesy, a reverent devotion to the chieftain of whose family he formed a part, and in whose renown and splendor he personally participated. During the period of the festival all was mirth, good cheer, and relaxation; that term expired, industry and economy resumed their duties. The cottagers returned to their brown crusts and stock-fish, and the buttery-hatch was

closed at the castle; while in each state of society the recollected delights of the last holiday, and the anticipated pleasures of the next, lightened each individual's respective cares and occupations, and bestowed a relish on their more abstemious fare; while the sacred origin and stated returns of these seasons of indulgence, endeared to the affections of all those holy anniversaries, which imprinted spiritual mercies on the minds of men, by connecting them with temporal enjoyment.

The double ceremony of Lady Matilda's marriage to Earl Guy of Warwick, and the baptism of the young heir of the house of Lancaster, were announced to take place on the feast of All-hallows; and they were to be performed with all the magnificence and sumptuous regale which befitted the rank of the hospitable prince in whose stately mansion they were to be celebrated; but ere the day arrived,

the papal excommunication was published, and not a priest could be found sufficiently hardy to administer these sacred rites. The noble guests who were invited, knowing that the stability of their own possessions was endangered by disobedience, avoided the interdicted walls as they would a pest-house; the vassals, divided between their affection for their lord and their dread of purgatory, alternately cursed the Pope, and sprinkled themselves with holy water. Matilda wept, Warwick raved, Lancaster retired to his oratory, to seek those consolations in solitary prayer which our enlightened age believes the contrite heart will surely enjoy, and to implore for his infant son that spiritual regeneration and mystical unction, of which the outward symbol was withheld by priestly tyranny; yet feeling, in its full force, the divine malediction originally pronounced against the unlawful shedder of man's blood,

even his virtues and his intelligence, though of a superior order, increased his solicitude to be re-united to that church, which, while he disowned its temporal domination, he believed possessed the admissive and exclusive keys to the kingdom of heaven.

CHAP. XX.

The giant, triple-crown'd, who long had bow'd
Beneath his yoke the monarchs of the earth,
Pretending power supreme from highest heav'n,
But working the commands of lowest hell.

THOMSON.

IF the Countess of Lancaster could have afforded herself time to consider how keen must be the anguish of the separated lovers, or how awful the struggle between contrition and patriotism, a just disdain of priestly presumption, and a religious regard for his immortal welfare, the situation of her lord and the affianced pair would have commanded her active sympathy, and banished her own disappointments from her mind. But she had been so habituated to regard every event chiefly as it affected her own inte-

rests, that self-indulgence had imperceptibly rendered a kind heart callous, and a gentle temper arrogant. The papal excommunication so disconcerted all her plans, and made her feel so very wretched, that she was astonished her kind lord, the affectionate Matilda, and the gallant Beauchamp, who knew her designs, and how deeply her susceptible heart felt every mortification, were not assembled in her chamber, trying to console her; especially as none of them seemed so deeply affected by hearing the sentence read as herself. Her lord, indeed, looked as pale and solemn as a brave captain who, after having volunteered "to mount the imminent deadly breach" at the impulse of honour, recollects, at the next moment, the endeared ties of love and nature, and feels his heart die at the remembrance; but he was silent and stood firm, while she fainted and filled the air with her shrieks. She doubted not his nice sense of honour

would resent the indignity, and feel the prohibitions annexed to the situation of a proscribed person; but then he actually disliked those enjoyments which habit had with her converted into necessaries. He could be happy alone: the hermit's maple dish and beechen bowl sufficed his wants; attendance was to him a burden; festivity was a blank or a penance, which tore him from his oratory or his study. She could not, would not, ought not to leave him, till he was again reconciled to the church; yet how could she support solitude and disgrace, without pleasant amusements or lively associates; with no other occupation than domestic management, or that self-communion which experience proved to be deplorably irksome? The manner of her lord shewed that he anticipated impending evil: what is foreseen may be better supported; but evil had overtaken her just as she was going to be unusually happy, and it was there-

fore more poignantly felt. She had anticipated a most joyous winter: the castles of Warwick, Canford, and Kenilworth were alternately to display festivals and tournaments. Gaveston was dead, and the realm at peace; surely the season of laughter should not be forgotten, if that of weeping was remembered. Lancaster indeed had once told her, that the King's calm aspect might be a vizor, assumed to conceal cherished revenge. Said he this to damp her joyous spirits? Her tremulous sensibility needed not these alarms, for her mild and timid temper required constant encouragement. Her confessor, the liberal, benevolent Sir Hilary, assured her, that a character of exquisite feeling should be treated like a tender nursling; he never, therefore, alarmed her by angry denunciations, nor imposed any troublesome penance; but instead of deepening the sense of her errors, he talked to her of her graces and

virtues. Beatrice was of the same opinion, and whispered what the commodious priest distantly hinted, that the Earl of Lancaster was too austere, cold, and misanthropic to be a meet companion for his Phœnix bride. The indulgence of her confessor, and the flatteries of her confidant, were corroborated by the prescriptions of her physician, who conjured her, for the sake of her infant son, to take a very reverent care of her health; to divert her fancy by the pleasures of the chace, music, dancing, and feasting; and by these means try to counteract, in the noble infant, the constitutional melancholy he would derive from his father. Alicia was very willing to be, in this instance, all the mother; and, with the assistance of Sir Hilary, an interlude had been prepared, adapted to the approaching festival, and replete with pleasant conceits and rare devices. Herself and her household purposed to honour the cere-

mony, by becoming performers. The wars of the fairies and the giants formed the basis of the drama, and her dwarf and jester were to lead their respective bands of combatants. Analogy and consistency did not restrain the excursive flight of Sir Hilary's muse; for the young heir of Lancaster was described as a present sent to that noble house by the Queen of the Fairies; and yet the Countess, in the character of Faith, was to bring the child to baptism. A paynim knight, interrupting the ceremony, was to call forth the chivalry of St. George; who, after slaying the Saracen, would conclude the piece by his marriage with the Princess of Egypt. All the previous preparations were complete: Alicia had, with her own hand, spangled her sky-blue robe with silver stars, and had conned her introductory speech, to announce her own character; which, with scriptural precision, described the acts of her worthies. Such

a waste of ingenuity and labour was not to be endured; and, added to the prospect of a winter's confinement, in a vast deserted castle, from which gaiety and grandeur would be banished, while her ears were alternately assailed by the peccavis of penitence, and the well-a-days of love, seemed an accumulation of misery beyond the power of mortal strength to endure. The tender maid, whose meek repinings she anticipated; and the sincere Christian, who would seek to expiate his fault by additional austerities, were, she thought, less pitiable than herself; because they were gifted with that fortitude which nature had denied her. Alas! how frequently do inconsiderateness and indolence charge nature with their own faults!

The confessor, the confidant, and the physician, were alternately summoned to console, advise, and sustain the weeping, lamenting, fainting lady; while the Earl

lay prostrate before the holy rood, humbly acknowledging that offence to Heaven which his enemies had converted into a deadly snare. When the day dawned, he joined Warwick and Matilda, who had spent the sad vigil of their expected bridals together, he in soothing her sorrow and dissipating her fears, she in calming his keen resentments and subduing his irritability, till, for the sake of each other, they mutually became composed, and mildly descanted on their future prospects. With the impetuous enterprize natural to youth, Warwick proposed to Lancaster that each should abide in his own castle, and, collecting his vassals, bid defiance to the Pope and the King. The names of Plantagenet and Beauchamp were, he said, too dear to their respective partizans, for their faith to be shaken by the fulminations of the pontiff, acting as the mean instrument of a prince who had thus contrived to

make his promised amnesty of no avail. But Lancaster had too deep a sense of the fault he had committd to meditate fresh transgressions. He abjured the questionable right of appealing to the sword against his King to revenge a private injury, and he denied that feudal lords could justly subject the consciences of their vassals to a dreadful competition between their spiritual and temporal duties. He felt, he said, the horrors of excommunication too strongly to expose the meanest of his hinds to the same anathema. The gasping head and convulsed limbs of Gaveston haunted his slumbers, and he resolved that the blood of a fellow-subject should never more imbrue his hands. It was necessary for his soul's peace that he should be reconciled to the King and the Church; and his first step would be to know if the proposed terms were consistent with his honour.

A signal from the warder interrupted

the conference, and announced (what in their present state was an unexpected grace,) an ecclesiastical visitor. Walter Stapleton, Bishop of Exeter, trusting to his unblemished sanctity and uniform submission to the holy see, feared not to enter the interdicted castle, and hold a conference with the excluded lords. From him they learned that two alternatives were proposed to their choice, as the propitiatory penance which, combined with submission, would procure reconciliation. They must either undertake a pilgrimage in honour of the Virgin, to her favourite residences of Loretto or Montserat, and serve a campaign against the infidels; or submit to be publicly scourged by the monks of St. Thomas a Becket, the avengers of the crime of assassination, and found two chantries with daily masses to pray for the Earl of Cornwall's soul.

The Earl of Lancaster, though he at

once preferred the former alternative, paused to consider the state of England. The Scots hung upon the borders, collected in a numerous body, with the alarming menace of determined invaders. Profiting by the dissentions between Edward and his barons, Bruce had summoned all his clans, and from Caithness to Tweedale nothing was heard but the sound of preparation, and the cry of revenge. Threatened by such an enemy, could England spare one faithful chieftain? The Bishop, perceiving the Earl's resolution unfixed, added, that he would undertake to promise the correction of the monks should be formal rather than positive. It had been undergone by mighty potentates, and could not therefore be esteemed disgraceful. Founding chantries was an act truly grateful to the pious, to whose devout feelings a speedy and peaceful re-admission to the temple and the altar must be most desirable. He be-

sought the Earls to consider their estate, supposing they were cut off by infidels before their prescribed term of probation had expired, as they would then die in that doubtful condition which the age contemplated with horror.

The Earl of Lancaster fixed his eyes on the crucifix, with which the devout Earls of Salisbury had furnished every apartment in their castle, and answered, that it did not become a sinner to object, on the score of degradation, to a punishment which his great exemplar had endured. His body needed chastisement, and he would submit, with all his soul, to the lowest abasement, but not at the shrine of Becket, whose power to intercede for him in Heaven he doubted, nay denied. The successors of St. Peter held the keys of the blessed mansions, to admit martyrs, confessors, and spotless virgins to the highest bliss, after they had gloriously triumphed over their spiritual enemies,

not to exalt to that bright pre-eminence the traitor who betrayed his country's rights, or the rebel who insulted his King. He owned that he was the instrument who wrongfully took away Gaveston's life, and was therefore bound to do all in his power to procure for him a remission of the penal fires to which, without due preparation, he hurried his soul; and he had already meditated the required endowment, which he would only postpone till he had registered his protest that it was not done in compliance with papal authority, which claimed a right to tax his temporal possessions. He was most willing to undertake a campaign against the enemies of the cross, and would joyfully pay his devotions to the blessed Virgin, either before her miraculous image at Montserat, or in that holy house which ministering angels had lately removed from the profaned soil of Palestine, and fixed in the patrimony of St.

Peter. This he would do, and during the period of his absence entrust his country to that Providence which had often wonderfully preserved it from menacing perils. The solemn call now made upon him reminded him of the purpose of his early life, and the means by which his intended self-dedication was prevented. He had persuaded himself that it was due deference to the advice of a revered friend; he now feared his own unruly appetites had given resistless cogency to those arguments. He had not then tried the world, as he had since done, even to satiety. It then wore a delusive smile, a semblance of permanent good. Here recollecting the contrasted images of the real and the imaginary Alicia, he heaved a painful sigh, and was silent.

"My personal services," resumed he, after a long pause, "cannot now defend England; but I will deprive her of as few faithful sons as possible. Only my me-

nial servants shall attend me to Spain, and I will leave with the brave knight who is my chamberlain, full power to array all my vassals, and join the army of England, whenever the King determines to raise his standard, and take the field to claim from proud Bruce the fealty he paid his father."

Permission to remain in England, which included the prospect of a speedy union with Matilda, softened the stern tone of Warwick's indignant spirit, and tempted him to quit the side of Lancaster. Nor was prostration before the shrine of one whom he held to be a pseudo-martyr and arch rebel, nor even the scornful wavings of the scourge (that symbol of abject subjection) over his athletic form by an emaciated monk so irreconcilable to his pride, as the idea of leaving his unprotected Matilda in the disposal of a versatile king, easily influenced by rapacious courtiers, as that idea was agonizing to

his tenderness. Had she but been his wife, she could then have accompanied him into Spain, without taint to her maiden fame, or otherwise remained in England, secure from all pretenders in the sanctity of the marriage vow. How did he now regret his passive acquiescence with the request of Lancaster's vain wife, that the ceremony might be deferred till she could have it celebrated in a style of unrivalled grandeur! If he left England, another Gondibert would appear, ask the hand of the wealthy orphan, and, either from imbecility or malice, the King would exclude the claims of the absent Warwick. Recalling all those horrid anticipations which urged his temper to frenzy, as he viewed the smoaking ruins of Balshall priory, he told the Bishop that he preferred the English penance; and would, after he had undergone it, cover the headless trunk of Gaveston with the banners of Scottish chiefs, till the King

should stanch his tears for the dead, and blend cordial affection for the living, with forgiveness of a salutary error.

Warmed by the anticipation of future happiness and glory, and driving from his thoughts the repulsive conditions which were to restore him to the privileges of a citizen, with that happy shortsightedness of sorrow which marks a sanguine temper, Warwick turned to his Matilda, to impart those designs that would illumine her pale cheek with the glow of hope and the smile of love; while Lancaster, with the caution of experience, and the apprehensions which his regard for Warwick inspired, privately adjured the Bishop to tell him if he thought it possible that they could be cordially reconciled to the King. Stapleton answered, with the simplicity of a placable and sincere heart, that he would pledge his best hopes for the King's faith. The new favourite, Spenser, a man of real talent, seemed wholly to engross him,

and much good was expected from his influence. Had it already produced any effect? inquired the Earl. Much: His Majesty was no longer light and versatile, frivolous and impetuous, but grave, calm, and determined; often lamenting that his faithful cousin Lancaster, and his brave knight Beauchamp, withdrew from his councils, and doubted his sincerity. The Earl sighed; repeated the words "faithful and brave!" recollecting his mother's prediction, that a mound was raised on Blacklow Hill which royal forgiveness would never overleap.

Addressing the Bishop of Exeter: "Though," said he, "you came only as a true churchman, to reconcile me to our holy mother, yet I know your kind nature will not shrink from further mediation. Commend me to my Lord the the King, and say, while the body of Lancaster shall be in Spain, his soul will remain in England. As a true subject,

I offer to my liege lord, my prayers, my purse, my knights, and my men at arms. Fain would I commend to his especial confidence and favour a scion of the Lancastrian rose, Henry of Leicester, whose late disclosed bloom has never been tainted by the canker of disloyalty. His sword, baptized in the blood of a sacrilegious ravisher, will prove a holy and invincible barrier to the proud boasts of Bruce and his rapacious marauders, should they dare to pass the English frontiers. If I be gladdened with the tidings that all is well, I will yet visit Palestine, and fulfil the task I undertook, in compliance with the command of our late revered monarch and captain. The sum which he devoted to the ransom of Christian captives shall be advanced by me as a voluntary mulct to expiate my offences. My wife and my son will remain in England, hostages of my fealty, and in the safe keeping of their royal kinsman's

honour, and the affection of a generous nation. In this my full and loyal submission to the King, I look not only to the anointed son of my illustrious uncle, but also to the sworn conservator of those laws which I confess I have rashly broken. But to the Bishop of Rome I owe neither suit nor service; and with you, reverend Father, I enter my protest against his temporal jurisdiction, though, as a true Catholic, owning him to be head of the universal church, of which I am a member, I embrace the penance he enjoins."

Thus, with a sophistry characteristic of a superstitious yet lofty mind, the Earl of Lancaster reconciled the extremes of abject submission and steady resistance. His own apprehensions of the King's concealing some vindictive design were not diminished by the assurances of Stapleton, whose sincerity he valued more than his discernment; but as he

perceived Warwick implicitly relied on this promised pardon, he deemed it a duty to conceal his own doubts, lest his impetuous friend, in the event of any obstacle to his expectation, should consider them as excitements to another insurrection, which, in the present state of affairs, must be attended with tremendous results to the nation.

On turning his thoughts to his domestic concerns, Lancaster considered that the safety of his wife and child was secured by the presence and power of his brother, whose unimpeached fidelity the King would not dare to alienate: beside that, his own feudatory troops would form a third portion of any army the King could bring into the field. But it was not on the score of safety that his apprehensions for Alicia rose; he could not propose to take her with him, knowing that her want of fortitude was an insuperable objection to her under-

taking a perilous voyage, a painful pilgrimage, and a dangerous sojourn, in a land overrun with infidels, and the constant scene of bloody contention. And had he not equal cause of fear from her want of discretion, if she remained in England. His continued admonitions could hardly counteract the opiates of ffattery, or the delusions of dissipation. The potency of the Lancastrian branch of Plantagenet would prevent external dangers; but where was the barrier which could defend her from those enemies to his peace which she cherished in her own bosom. Yet, should the injunctions of the church be slighted, and his soul's weal be endangered, the energies of the patriot paralyzed, and the saint recalled from his heavenly aspirations to become the warder and the monitor of a vain, weak woman? No; he must do his duty, secure his own salvation, requalify

himself for the calls of his high station, and leave her to Providence.

The pious credulity which induced sincere devotees to believe that the ministers of religion partook of the immaculate sanctity of the altar at which they offered the vows of the faithful, induced the Earl of Lancaster to consider his wife's confessor as a man to whom he might intrust his anxieties; and, in the full conviction that Sir Hilary was disposed to an honest discharge of his duty towards his volatile penitent, he informed him of his doubts respecting the discretion and resolution of his consort. The venal priest had long laboured cautiously, but sedulously, to alienate the affections of De Lacy's wealthy heiress from her princely spouse, well knowing, that if she desired, her pre-contract to Surrey (which had never been formally abrogated) would dissolve her present marriage, and leave her at liberty to renew her vows with a

nobleman, whose gratitude pointed to the mitred abbey of Ripon as a reward for the assistance which his spiritual functions might afford. Beatrice was also bound to Surrey's interest by bribes and promises; and even the physician was secured by similar motives, to be treacherous to his master, and faithful to his insidious employer. Thus was formed a secret junto, pledged to betray the unhappy lady, to whom they appeared as commodious instruments of her will, and enraptured admirers of her singular perfections.

It was highly necessary that the Earl of Lancaster should not be undeceived, as to the character and intentions of the man who was to act so conspicuous a part in this dark conspiracy against his peace and honour; yet, on being urged to give his opinion, as to the most prudent method of disposing of Alicia, during her lord's absence, the practised deceiver could hardly suppress a visible

expression of satisfaction, at finding that his machinations might be carried on without the counteraction of an affectionate, but high-minded husband, who, so far from suspecting his design, depended on his fidelity. He threw his eyes to the earth, lest they should appear to welcome the mitre, which seemed just dropping upon his head, and uttered an eulogium on the Earl's piety, in seeking an immediate reconciliation with the church by the combined exercise of devotion and valour, conjuring him not to let the fervour of his zeal and courage be impeded by apprehensions for the conduct of his lady. He had studied her character, and found all rectitude and purity in her intentions; though her susceptibility was acute, her affections vehement, and her health delicate. The most tender treatment was requisite to one who, being too much prone to self-accusation, sunk under the gentlest remonstrance; yet, her

perceptions of excellence were so refined, and her desire of high and honourable renown so insatiable, that he knew these sensations would not only be her sure preservatives from all that was degrading and vicious, but would also stimulate her, if she were generously left sole mistress of her own conduct, to the practice of such lofty virtues as would make the Earl proud of his fair partner, and give to her name a celebrity exceeding what the most eminent ladies in England ever could boast. But as spirits of so exalted a class could only refine their own dross, as the diamond affords means to produce its own polish, the Earl must have patience till, by spiritual aid, her soul threw off its youthful exuberances. An unsparing liberality, which a narrow soul or limited means might deem profusion, was one of those exuberances; yet surely in her it was a venial error.

Lancaster interrupted the confessor: "Far be it from me," said he, "whose rent-roll contrasted with the charter of the royal demesnes, reflects poverty on them; far be it from me to prescribe thrift to the heiress of De Lacy! Contrariwise, I should rejoice if she could devise means, virtuously and wisely, to rid me of that superflux, for which I feel the responsibility of an anxious steward. Nature does not bring forth her products with such prodigality as will suffice to gorge a race of Polyphemes, and the favoured guests who are seated at her tables of plenty must remember to banquet with decorous moderation; not casting the offals of their luxury to the world's commoners, but inviting their less happily supplied fellow-creatures to participate in their enjoyments. If my wife shall perform acts of honourable munificence, if she erect schools and colleges, repair the temples of the Most

High, endow hospitals, patronize learning, encourage genius, feed the destitute, employ the indigent, I will pawn the heir-looms left me by my ancestors, ere her bounty shall be checked by the limitations of rigid prudence; I will leave her, as you advise, uncontrolled mistress of her own actions, and of the income of a princely patrimony. On you, father, I depend, to impress upon a spirit which you describe as so truly noble, a sense of the responsibility implied in this trust. Direct her contempt of wealth and desire of fame to its true aim; and to the blessings of those numerous children of affliction whom these evil times will drive to seek the shelter of her fostering care, shall be added the thanks and the prayers of a joyful husband. To intimate any other reward, would be an offence to your sanctity."

Sir Hilary folded his hand in his robe, and, by an emphatic motion of his head,

indicated his renunciation of all the vanities that wealth and power could bestow. After complimenting the Earl on his penetration, in thus rightly interpreting his character, he enquired as to the time of his quitting England, and found that every preparation was completed, and that he now only delayed his departure on two accounts, one of which was to bid farewell to his consort. Beatrice, who was now summoned, stated that her lady had spent a night in the severest agony; but the physician had at length succeeded in lulling her. She had fallen into a calm slumber, which it was hoped would reinvigorate her exhausted frame. Sir Hilary strongly advised that she should be spared the pang of parting. If the blandishments of her tenderness or pity for her distress diverted Lord Lancaster from his pious design, the weight of an unperformed obligation would lie upon his conscience. Beside, there was a

hazard that the lady, in her exclamatory anguish, might utter some unweighed reprehension of the sacred authority by which they were separated, of which, as a church-man, he must perforce take cognizance. Lancaster yielded to these dissuasives. He well knew that Alicia's tears could shake, though not overthrow his fortitude; and an important ceremony to be performed, previous to his departure, required him to preserve a firm, collected mind. On condition of his immediately embarking for Spain, the Bishop of Exeter promised privately to baptize his child, and permit him to witness the sacred rite. His train were already equipped and mustered, eager to signalize their courage against the Moors. The wind was fair for the Bay of Biscay, and a galley, that brought a son of the King of Castile to the English court, was ready to return. Lancaster hastened to

Alicia's apartment, and as he kissed her pale, unconscious cheek, still wet with tears, implored the Holy Virgin and every saint in Heaven to confirm her virtues, and preserve her innocence. This done, he gave a solemn charge to her attendants, to be discreet, affectionate, and faithful to their lady, during his absence; and then, with lowly obeisances, presented himself at the door of the chapel, where the charitable Bishop, holding the young Plantagenet in his arms, stood before the font, waiting the father's approach, before he pronounced the sanctifying words, and imprinted on the forehead of the babe the sign of admission into the Christian church.

Moved by compassion for the unoffending infant, and friendship for the contrite father, the Bishop thus far consented to relax the severities of ecclesiastical cen-

sure, but to admit the Earl within the holy edifice set apart for the congregations of the faithful, was a privilege which he could not grant. Yet, even from the exterior porch, once appropriated to catechumenical novices, to contemplate the services of the temple,—and, as he lay prostrate on the sacred threshold, to make his confession, and return humble thanks for the unmerited grace bestowed on his son,—was a consolation of such inestimable value, that it seemed cheaply purchased by the lowest abasement. In consideration of his speedy submission, Stapleton further granted him a conditional absolution, to be in force as soon as he touched the shores of Spain or Italy. This was to restore him to the comforts of confession, and attendance on the daily ministrations, though his full reconciliation could only be awarded by the Father hermit of Montserrat, or the

officiating priest of Loretto. Thus, with a heart lightened of its most insupportable anguish, Lancaster entered on his prescribed labours.

CHAP. XXI.

Leisure is pain; takes off our chariot wheels;
How heavily we drag the load of life!
Blest leisure is our curse; like that of Cain,
It makes us wander; wander earth around
To fly that tyrant thought. As Atlas groan'd
The world beneath, we groan beneath an hour.
We cry for mercy to the next amusement.

YOUNG.

ALICIA awoke from her slumbers with tranquillized nerves, and now recollecting that there were more human beings than herself, she inquired after Warwick and Matilda. They had left Canford, the former to be reconciled to the Church and the King, the latter to seclude herself in the nunnery of Amesbury, till circumstances should permit her marriage. The parting of the lovers was described by Dorcas, as she waited on her lady's toilette, with a minute pa-

thos, which induced Alicia to sigh, because her lord never talked so passionately, or left her with such reluctance, and even to remark on the painful contrast. Surely, as she had been so dreadfully indisposed, the Earl of Lancaster might have anticipated her rising with his inquiries; but she would, however, set him an example of affectionate solicitude, and send to ask if he was well. All her maidens were silent. The alarm of sincere love instantly subdued the petulance of caprice. Had any ill befallen him. None; but he had left England, without staying to inform her of the occasion or period of his absence. Her throbbing heart sickened at the tidings, and the acuteness of the pang told her it was with real sorrow.

The confessor, the confidant, and the physician were again summoned; but the latter was speedily dismissed, the deserted wife refused to consider her health,

or even her life, of any consequence if it was of no value in the eyes of her lord. The colouring which Sir Hilary and Beatrice gave to his parting behaviour, changed her pity for Matilda into envy, and persuaded her that there was not a creature in the universe so wretched as herself. Would she were with her dearest Lancaster in exile, in peril; or rather, since he hated and despised her, would she were in her grave! What was the world now to her! A mournful void, a maze of perplexities, a wilderness of cares! The priest shook his head mournfully, and exhorted her to bear her cross with patience. Beatrice wept aloud, that such unmerited trials were the lot of so excellent a being, and accused the malignant stars which had hindered her from becoming the wife of a most indulgent and affectionate nobleman. Alicia's frowns awed her into silence, while she herself meditated on

her own childish regrets and wayward inattention to her lord's solemn griefs and important cares. How would she reform her own weakness and minister to his anxieties, could she but exchange situations with the meanest slave, who, by attending her lord in his voyage, was privileged to gaze on his countenance, and hear wisdom and sanctity speak in his voice.

She did not long remain in this state of agony. The Earl of Leicester came to offer his protection to his brother's wife, and to assure her, that she was left mistress of her own conduct and his fortunes; and Sir Robert Holland, after witnessing the embarkation of his master, returned to Canford, charged with this epistle, which was intended to be at once her consolation and guide.

"Most dear lady, my beloved and right-noble wife, our trusty friend,

Sir Robert Holland, will inform thee on what account I embark for Spain, to serve a campaign against the infidels under the banner of Alphonso of Castile, and why I further purpose, in obedience to the church, and in consideration of the benefits I have ever received from the Holy Virgin, to join the devout hermits of Montserrat in their devotions, and, perchance, accompany the pilgrims who annually visit the wonderful Santa Casa, which, in our age, has been carried by angels over wide seas and vast regions, and fixed at Loretto, to comfort the faithful and silence gainsayers. After due prayers and oblations, I trust to become reconciled to the church, and pardoned for all my offences.

"I intreat thee, dearest Alicia, not only to pray incessantly for my safety and return, but to expedite it by thy good deeds and wise, pious deportment. The large possessions, of which I give

thee the expenditure, are only to be employed as the means of securing thee an eternal inheritance, sparingly for thy own indulgence, liberally for others' wants. Use hospitality, but avoid a dangerous intimacy with worldly pleasures, knowing how likely they are to ensnare thy soul, and that slander points her arrows at her who strays far from her abode while her lord is absent. Again, I admonish thee; improve thine acquaintance with thyself. To prevent the misuse of time, the germ of all our misdoings, occupy thyself nobly and usefully: our wealth will allow thee to found an hospital and a school at each of our principal castles, that the aged and the infirm may be sheltered in the one, and students trained in the other, in such suitable knowledge as may preserve England from the disgrace of sending to Rome for priests, instructed to betray the independence of her church, or em-

ploying such ignorant pastors as cannot read the breviary and interpret scripture. And it is my request that thou wouldst daily visit these foundations, not only to see that all is wisely and honestly ordered, but to school thyself to the practice of humility and gratitude.

" I have left the management of my estates and the array of my vassals to the care of my noble brother, and of my right trusty knight-chamberlain, with whom, as faithful counsellors, I wish thee to advise. Deport thyself reverently to the King, and, on all occasions, remember that as eminence in station makes the light of our virtues seen from afar, so it also denies us that covert of obscurity which would else have concealed our faults. And, if I fall in the perilous expedition I have undertaken, I intreat thee so to remember who was thy husband, and from what race thou hast sprung, as to pass thy days of widowhood dis-

creetly, and patiently; educating my son in the Catholic faith, and in obedience to the laws; and keeping up all my pious and charitable institutions. And thus, in the hope of meeting thee again soon in this world, and finally, in the mansions of the blessed, I bid thee heartily farewell; from thy most true husband,

"THOMAS OF LANCASTER."

A letter so full of pious counsel, and expressive rather of discriminating affection than impassioned tenderness, was not exactly what Alicia wished to receive; yet, since it assured her that Lancaster left her in perfect charity, as it was a pledge of his fidelity, and implied a confidence in her discretion, it was invaluable, especially as her conscience whispered it was more than she deserved. She pressed it alternately to her lips and her heart, and finally deposited it in her breviary, to be daily consulted as her perpetual monitor.

While the impression of these counsels was recent, Alicia distinguished herself by the most punctual compliance. The preliminary duties of examining plans for the edifices which she was invited to erect, determining their scite, signing grants of lands, and riding with a train of ladies and knights to inspect the progress of the buildings, were extremely pleasant, nor was the selection of meet inhabitants irksome. These occupations exercised her taste, soothed her pride, gratified her benevolence, and were attended with that parade and popularity which she deemed delightful; and, during this happy period, she dispatched a page to Spain, charged with the following reply to her illustrious spouse:—

"Right noble and most dear lord and husband, this comes from your true wife, who desires your return above all things, and daily prays for your

safety and honour, which, if her poor services could promote, she would willingly lay down her life. I have further to inform you, that our young Edmund is well, and that all our affairs prosper. I am building six fair edifices, as you advised me, such as have rarely been seen in England; and I will endow them with similar magnificence from portions of my father's lands. The King has agreed to take the Earl of Warwick into his favour, who will espouse the Lady Matilda as soon as the great array, now proceeding against Scotland, has driven Bruce beyond the Grampians; for the realm is now all agreed, that it is a foul shame for a King of England to be bearded in his own demesne by a rebel highlander, who broke fealty to his father. Leicester and Holland lead on your brave Lancastrians; and I have, with my own hands, embroidered their banner, in which, ever remembering my

most dear lord, I have over the Red Rose designed a beaming cresset with this motto, 'I shine in the absence of the sun.' And when they return I will practise the hospitality you advise, by welcoming home the victors with revelry and minstrelsy, such as the wife of a royal peer should provide. And further, according to what I know, your pious wishes would enjoin, intermingling with rewards for the living requiems for the dead, and largesses to those whom war has made destitute. With this account of your household and friends, I bid you heartily farewel, praying the Holy Mother to take her true worshipper into her especial keeping; from your faithful wife,

"ALICIA LANCASTER."

Thus wrote, and thus thought the lady, during the first zest of her employments; but, as is ever the case in all human designs, there soon arose

inconveniences; while thwarting difficulties and perverse humours required the exercise of such homely qualities as thought, and patient investigation. The gay young beauty found the management of her charities a heavy task on her indolence and levity, and soon yielded to the request of her confessor, who offered to be her almoner, and superintend the ungrateful, querulous beings, whom it was her hard fortune to have selected as objects of benevolence. She reconciled herself to this act of disobedience to her lord, by arguing that, though she was most willing to do her duty, she was not required to persevere at hazard of her life. The sight of discontented, miserable people made her unhappy; it even made her unwell. From motives of benevolence she had preferred the most pitiable objects for her pensioners; but though the thought of relieving them was pleasant, an assem-

blage of blind, maimed, diseased beings was revolting to the eye. Such sights might be requisite to read lessons of humility to iron nerves and callous hearts; on her they inculcated an entire disgust at life, and certainly this was what her lord did not intend. As the potion was too strong she must dilute it: diurnal were therefore changed to weekly visits: these were quickly prolonged to the rotations of the moon, and at last, she grew so irreconcilable to the language of complaint, and the presence of calamity, that the visits were wholly omitted.

An acquaintance with herself would have told the Countess of Lancaster, that if real suffering must not be querulous, lest it should drive compassion from its couch, the victim of imaginary ills, and the murmurer at petty inconveniences, deserve censure instead of pity. But her humble companions, bred in habits of acquiescent servility, if they

discovered her egotism and impatience, durst not suggest a remark which would lead to improvement. They treated her as a perfect being, a native of the celestial regions, who, while honouring the earth with her presence, had a right to the services of the whole creation. Yet they admitted that, though she could not be wrong, she might be unfortunate and even ill-treated. If she frowned, all were ready to sooth and amuse her; while her smiles were hailed as the precursors of festivity. That acquaintance with real misery, which her lord advised as the corrective of fastidiousness, being laid aside, Alicia was deprived of the salutary relief of shade, which the splendour of uniform prosperity requires; and losing an incentive to generous exertion and a sentiment of thankfulness at her own happier lot, she soon began to sicken in the sunshine, and, like a humoured child, to forego the present

good, while pining for some untried pleasures. Sinking under the lassitude of self-indulgence, weary of rural sports, and of those agile exercises and those designs of taste and ingenuity in which her attendants only witnessed her skill, the strains of her minstrels were scarce regarded, and she laid by her lute in disgust. The banquet was served in ostentatious stupidity, while the jester in his motley coat, and the dwarf with his dagger of lath, bandied their quaint jests and coarse merriment, unhonoured by the smile of their languid lady. Her female train, yawning in sympathy, soon shewed that they had caught the infection, and persuaded the Countess that her lord's injunction to the practice of hospitality proceeded from his conviction that such refined excellence must not be immured in solitude. True, she had given their due honours to every festive season. Canford, Pontefract, and

Kenilworth had alternately been the scenes of magnificent entertainments; but, with the amusements of the day, the hilarity they inspired had vanished. Novelty was wanting to give a zest to diversion, and it was now the time to remember another of the Earl of Lancaster's directions, and shew her respect to the King. The court then lay at Newcastle, there the royal banner was unfurled, and troops poured in from all quarters to take part in the Scottish wars. Pursuing the thought, Beatrice asked why should not her lady, as a countess in her own right, put herself at the head of her immediate vassals, mounted on a white palfrey, and followed by a knight carrying her young son, and by a long train of ladies splendidly attired, with handsome pages walking by their sides. It would be respectful to the King; she could well afford it; and many ladies had ac-

quired prodigious renown by appearing in camps, and animating warriors by their smiles to deeds of prowess which they could not otherwise have achieved. No objection could arise from the hazard of such an undertaking. Never had England put forth an array so great and magnificent. An hundred thousand men were collected, completely armed and ably appointed. The knights vied with each other in the splendour of their equipage and the ingenuity of their devices. The military engines were numerous and dreadful; even the war-wolves of the great Edward were brought out, and not a walled town in Scotland could resist their pressure. Edward Bruce, who audaciously laid siege to the castle of Stirling, was expected to give up the enterprize in despair. It was known that his brother Robert trembled on his throne; all was terror north of the Tweed; all confidence and gaiety at

Newcastle, which combined the splendour of a court with the energies of a camp. Scotland was so sure to submit, that feasting and merriment softened the rough features of war; and surely it was wrong to be shut up in the lonely castle of Pontefract, where they could hear the neighing of steeds and the shouting of warriors passing to this glorious concourse, and not visit the soul-animating scene, nor share the laurels which must be the portion of such an invincible host! Even the Earl of Lancaster would testify his approbation, when, at his return, he was shewn the pennon of Mac Moray or Douglass, which had been laid at his lady's feet as one of the spoils of Caledonia, due to her courage and her beauty.

The letter to which Alicia had once daily referred as her monitor, proscribed an intimate acquaintance with worldly pleasures: but who could call following

a camp, pleasure? It was not retirement, true; but it was glory. To the best of her recollection, glory was not prohibited; but the Countess had mislaid her breviary, so could not refer to it's instructions. Sophistry is ingenious, and subterfuges are never wanting to assist a craving inclination and lax principles. All was done as her advisers prompted; and the lady had the satisfaction of leading a cavalcade of knights and ladies from Pontefract to Newcastle, alike eminent for personal beauty and gorgeous equipment. In a reign when England piqued itself on gallant cavaliers, rather than on hardy combatants, the surpassing splendor of this array furnished conversation for Edward's boastful warriors, and would have removed from his own breast his abhorrence of the name of Lancaster, if revenge had not been too deeply implanted to give place to the fopperies which amused his imagination; and if

his minions, provoked at the eclipse of their own efforts, had not invidiously whispered in the royal ear, that every scarf was spotted with the blood of Gaveston.

The knights of the Red Rose (for so Alicia named her champions) were not the last who assembled at Newcastle. The gallant Beauchamp arrived next day, at the head of his paternal bands; and having encamped them on the vast plain, in the centre of which the standard of England was unfurled, hastened to pay his duty to his sovereign, and publicly receive the long-promised pardon. It was given with an appearance of gracious cordiality; but those who could interpret the looks of kings, read in Edward's a settled abhorrence, and shuddering reluctance, ill concealed by the forced smile with which he invited Beauchamp to be a guest at the banquet he that evening gave to his captains. Even that sanguine

youth could not but perceive how pale the King looked; and how cold was the enervated hand which, as it raised him from his knees, refused the cordial pressure that betokened amity. "The King has not forgiven me," said he to Hereford; "this is only the foretaste of a reconciliation, which I will consummate in some bloody encounter, if the moss-trooping Scot gives us leave to try our manhood."

"Young man," replied the veteran, "hast thou forgot the greeting which even Thomas Plantagenet received from our northern neighbours? I felt the hard grasp of their mailed hands at a time when they called us the valiant Southerns, and no motley fool among them durst attempt to flatter doating beldames, by scoffing at the King or the realm of England. Seek not to purchase the royal favour, by offering to go on the forlorn hope against such an enemy, unless con-

tent to stake thy heart's blood for a toy, which shall be won from thee again by the jest of a buffoon, or the vaultings of a dancer."

The earls withdrew together, speaking with concern of Lady Lancaster's design of accompanying the army into Scotland; and Warwick undertook to warn her of its dangerous impropriety, but neither the banquet nor the ball which followed, afforded opportunity for grave admonition. All was splendid exhibition, loud mirth, and festivity. Among the barons the suit of Surrey was as much distinguished for its magnificence, as that of Alicia was among the ladies. Either by chance or design he wore her livery, and many remarks were made on this coincidence. Lancaster was known to have sinned against the King's affections, and the Queen's vanity, beyond the possibility of forgiveness. It is a maxim with courtiers to hasten the fall of the rock

which they suspect has been undermined; and defamatory whispers against the princely pilgrim were blended with wishes that he never might return again to sever the goodly pair, who were now selected by the admiring voices of all the circle to dance a measure together. Surrey pressed the yielded hand of the Countess with a look which protested that time and absence had not liberated his heart, and he led her through the mazes of the dance with graceful vivacity. A tumult of applause followed the performance, mixed with sarcastic gibes on mopes and dullards, who preferred a mouldy relic to a lady's glove. Alicia heard the taunts which disclaimed the decorum of privacy: they were extremely offensive, highly irritating; and yet those who uttered them professed to be her friends, and greeted her in the grateful language of "Fairest lady, surely if the Lord Lancaster were worthy such a treasure, he

would have sought absolution from those eyes, where dwells the benignity and brightness of heaven."

Speeches of this kind, repeated by almost every beholder, and always enforced by a deep-drawn sigh from Surrey, whose silence spoke more expressively than words could have done, excited in the bosom of Alicia an emotion, so different from the listless uniformity of her late life, that she could hardly tell whether it were pain or pleasure. She consulted her confessor, who assured her that it was a delightful and noble sensation. Praise was the appropriated aliment of generous minds, without which they would languish; and the perturbation of which she complained, was a proof that her's was recovering from the apathy of misanthropy, brought on by injudicious management.

Alicia then acknowledged that, beside this universal admiration, she was dis-

tressed by the marked assiduities of the Earl of Surrey. She blushed as she spoke, for the father's eyes were fixed upon her face, with an expression which made her shudder, though she durst not interpret its meaning.

"'Tis plain, noble lady," said he, "the Earl of Surrey still loves you. He has tried time and absence, and finding them ineffectual, abandons his soul to the sad consolation of meditating on his once destined wife, the fairest and the best of all created beauties. Yet surely, though he restrains his passion within those rules of chivalry which holy church does not interdict, it is my duty to inquire if this discovery has awakened in your heart any sensation more painful than pity, or regrets that there are impediments to becoming his wife?"

Alicia answered, "None."

"No wish," resumed Sir Hilary, "that the contract, which the church has

not yet annulled, had not been suspended, by your hasty union with the Earl of Lancaster ?"

Alicia indignantly repeated the expurgatory epithet, and, with clasped hands, prayed for the life and return of her dear and honoured lord. The eyes of Sir Hilary fell on the ground, while he struggled to conceal his mortification, by faintly answering, all then was well. "Had this been the case," resumed he, "you must have submitted to a course of mortification, and been interdicted the sight of Lord Surrey; but since such is the strictness of your fidelity, I may continue to allow, nay prescribe you, the free use of worldly delights, during your residence with the court, by way of corrective to that injurious melancholy with which the loneliness of your usual habits infects your spirits. Fear not, therefore, while your passions are in this happy state of subjection, to gladden the festive circles

with your presence; or to cheer the desponding heart of noble Surrey with a smile, sweet and chaste as those of virgin martyrs, who thus, when expiring at the stake, converted their bloody persecutors." The priest closed his eyes, and awhile seemed wrapped in holy meditation; and then added, "As soon as you feel the least temptation to swerve from duty, fail not on your salvation to consult me, that I may instantly prescribe remedies."

Scarce had Sir Hilary quitted the confessional, when the shriek of Mabel interrupted the Lady's meditations on the singular liberality of her ghostly father. The terrified nurse ran into the apartment, exclaiming, "He is dead, a miracle only can restore him!" The apprehensions of Alicia instantly pointed to the objects which most forcibly interested her heart,—her child, her lord; but Mabel continued to wring her hands,

and without answering any inquiries, by her unconscious lamentations relieved the fears she had excited. "O!" continued she, "the child I so often dandled on my knee, the gallant knight who never passed me without tossing me a noble, and pleasantly saying, 'What! old dame Mabel, cheating the worms still? There is a trifle for thee to fee the sexton, who grows marvellously angry at thy keeping him out of work.' Ah! so brave as he was last night featly footing with the Lady Eleanor of Gloucester, and telling her if Hugh Spenser was not a livelier wooer, he should still be married before her. Yes, and scoffed at the Queen's pranked-up maidens, saying, they must find fresh perfumes and washes ere they would seem to him as sweet as this flower of the mountains. Dear lady, why don't you weep, so as your noble lord loved his friend Warwick; so as all the

world loved him, but the wicked King and Queen, and their murdering minions who poisoned him at last night's banquet."

"Speak you of Warwick!" said Alicia, "of Warwick, dead, poisoned!"

"Dead and poisoned," resumed the half frantic mourner; "but it is only poor people dare tell the truth. The lords wo'n't venture to say so, lest they should get served in the same way. So they shake their heads, and debate who will lead on the bands of the Beauchamps; but I know more than they do: this is only the beginning of sorrows; though if the holy saints and the old roan hobby will once more carry me safe to Pontefract-castle, my old bones shall never be dragged out again to look at kings and queens, and run the hazard of being murdered by them. Dearest lady, let us all hurry away. Better ransom your lands from the Scots than for-

feit your life; for the bewitched King never will forgive those who set England free from the curse of Gaveston."

The bold accusations of Mabel, and a recollection of the ominous presages once expressed by her lord, filled Alicia with such apprehensions for the safety of herself and her son, that her regret for her early playmate, and her pity for Matilda, were suspended by those precautions which the spoiled children of prosperity first think of in the hour of danger, and then felicitate themselves on being prudent. She sent for the Earl of Hereford to come and protect her, who reluctantly left the corpse of the young nobleman, of whom he and England conceived the highest hopes, to know (for so her message imported) what threatened the life of noble Lancaster's wife and son. By the time the rough chieftain reached her quarters, Alicia and her attendants had by participation so aggravated their terrors,

that, crowding together in an obscure apartment, they looked like the fatal sisters of northern mythology, performing their secret incantations. Supreme in horror, Alicia sat upon the ground, clasping her son to her bosom, and seeming to conceal him with her disheveled hair.

"Courage, dearest lady," said one of the maidens, "here is the brave Earl of Hereford, who will save our lives."

"From whom?" said the Earl entering.

"From the King, who will poison us like the Earl of Warwick," was repeated by various voices.

"Fools!" said Bohun, angrily: "What mismanagement is there in this mansion? Are there no employments for the household, that thus a number of idle women assemble in groupes to utter scandal, and scare away each other's senses? Begone, triflers, to some housewife's task, while I commune with your lady."

Awed by his words, the women withdrew, and Alicia saw the necessity of exercising self-command while she addressed the stern comforter, whose mind, impressed by the scene he had just left, and well divining its portentous aspect, was too occupied to practise the courtesy required by the humoured fancies of a wayward lady. Ashamed to acknowledge that she thought most of her own safety, she only inquired if the Earl of Warwick was indeed dead.

"Most true, lady," answered Hereford, and brushed a tear from his cheek. "Beshrew my soul, the sight has unmanned me. That fair pilgrim, — her silent distress. She still sits motionless by the body. A lovely creature as ever my eyes beheld. She arrived but last night, to bring him a precious amulet that would heal wounds. I fear," continued Hereford, sobbing aloud, "they will be buried in one grave."

Alicia forgot her own terrors at this lively description of Matilda's distress, and with that quick diversion of impulse which marks keen sensibility when stimulated to action, gave her hand to Hereford, and begged he would instantly conduct her to the mourner.

"It will be a kind act to offer your protection to the destitute maiden?" said Hereford, "but you cannot teach her fortitude till you have recollected your own. Adjust your attire; compose your features; and tell me what is the danger from which you sent for me to rescue you."

Alicia then disclosed in what manner Mabel had accounted for the sudden death of Beauchamp.

"Chain up that gossip's tongue," said Bohun, "and as you value your lord's life, and the lives of his compatriots, let not a word or look betray that you have listened to its babblings. The ho-

nour of England is committed against Scotland; and we must not blot the escutcheon of our king lest our own shields should be cloven by the Highland claymore. And to ensure our persons against similar attacks we must appear unsuspicious, and be unanimous; for if one baron has fallen a victim to revenge, many will be sacrificed to safety."

There was a considerable share of native generosity in Alicia's character, which, like her other virtues, being lulled by the song of adulation, slumbered on the lap of ease. She soon perceived, that by a precipitate flight to one of her own fortresses, she should betray to the King her apprehensions; sow division in the army; and perhaps hasten the execution of some nefarious design against other barons who had taken part in the late insurrection. She consulted Hereford on what course she should pursue, who, hastily chiding her for coming into

a turbulent scene unsuited to her sex, and derogatory to her character, advised her to quit it, as soon as she could do so without appearing to fly through terror, or retire in disgust. Recollecting her late conduct with renewed disapprobation, Alicia protested that she would devote herself to the consolation of the amiable Matilda. "If she lives," said Hereford; and, with accelerated speed, they hastened to Warwick's quarters.

The cause of the premature death of Guy de Beauchamp continues to be one of the enigmas which history has not resolved. No circumstances have been recorded which explain why the charge of poisoning him was fixed upon the King; and as his death was unpropitious to the royal cause, candour requires posterity to acquit Edward of the weak revenge of sacrificing the Earl, long after he had given the provocation, and at a time when his services would have been highly im-

portant, especially, as by cutting him off he risked the alienation of his half-reconciled barons. Superstition and rash judgment are the general errors of mankind in rude ages, ever prone to have recourse to the marvellous, to see ominous prodigies, to discover divine visitations in every extraordinary occurrence, and to suspect secret murders. In those diseases which eluded the discernment, or baffled the skill of the unscientific leach, or the nostrums in the gossip's herbal, our ancestors discovered the malignant witch or the invincible sorcerer; and when a premature or sudden death defeated some fondly cherished hope, or frustrated an important design, the catastrophe was not referred to slowly consuming phthisis, or sanguineous apoplexy, but to some secret agent of an adversary who, deeply versed in the infernal art of destruction, could temper his poisonous potion with such exactness as to make the life

and the sufferings of the victim extend to whatever day or year the employer commanded.

At this period the situation of the barons and that of the kingdom were equally critical. The former were shut up with their sovereign in a walled town, where no troops but his household guards were admitted, their own feudal bands having either marched off to the general rendezvous at Berwick, or else having encamped under their respective banners, in a large plain on the other side the Tyne. As for the kingdom, it was suffering under the severe punishment of scarcity, the consequence of unfavourable seasons and neglected agriculture, aggravated by those predatory incursions of the Scots, which had, for many years, laid waste the northern counties. The dormant spirit of the nation had at last been stimulated to rush on the marauders, and compel their submission, as the only

means of preserving the kingdom from that tremendous kind of undisciplined warfare which gives the most ample scope to the demons of lust, avarice, and revenge. But though stung to the quick by a long succession of these outrages, the wasteful effects of which were perceived even in the most southern extremity of the realm, so much had the King's mal-administration indisposed the minds of his subjects, and mis-directed their passions, that they were more ready to rise against him, than to rescue themselves from the shame and ignominy of seeing one-third of the kingdom annually laid waste, the harvest burnt or devoured by strangers, the cattle driven off, the dwellings of the husbandman destroyed, and the inhabitants obliged to shelter in walled towns, or within fortified castles.

The immense but ill constituted multitudes which, at the royal summons,

were assembled by their respective barons, depended as much on the expectation of plunder as on regular pay for their remuneration. Ignorant of the difficulties of the enterprize in which they had embarked, yet, recollecting how often the late King had laid waste Scotland with a smaller force, they proudly anticipated an easy conquest, and counted the spoils of Dumfries and Edinburgh as certain as the wages of a daily hireling. Yet in spite of revenge, avarice, and the pride of national honour, the King's banner was in danger of being deserted when the tidings of the Earl of Warwick's death reached the camp, accompanied by the accusation that his fate had been basely hastened. A mutinous disposition instantly appeared; the soldiers left their stations, disobeyed their leaders, wandered sullenly through the camp, or gathered in small parties, listening to the tales of some who had seen omens, or the narratives of others who

described, or rather invented circumstances, which turned suspicion into certainty. Without investigating the probability of those reports which detailed conversations that could not have been overheard, and revealed purposes that must have been secret, a murmur of discontent announced a determination to clear the court of murderers before they drove the heath-brousing Scot to seek refuge in the Orkneys or Hebrides; and they proceeded to fortify the camp, defying the monarch, and even their own barons if they opposed their designs.

The King's council was at this time composed of lords who, though guiltless of the death of Gaveston, had heartily engaged in the designs of Lancaster and Warwick. However the principles of these chiefs might dispose them to encourage whatever made the court unpopular, a sense of duty arising from public danger, and regard to their own safety,

compelled them to give their support to regal authority. In this emergency, they recommended that the Earl of Hereford, the Countess of Lancaster, and her young son, should be detained at Newcastle, in reality as pledges to secure the fidelity of their followers, though ostensibly with every profession of care for their persons; and that the nobleman who was most popular among the commons should be sent to the camp, to endeavour to persuade them to return to their duty. This advice was instantly adopted. Hereford was called into personal attendance on his royal brother-in-law, and a part of the household troops were stationed at the Countess of Lancaster's quarters, under the pretence of a guard of honour to supply the place of her knights of the Red Rose, whose impetuosity had already spurred them to the banks of the Tweed, to gain the first-fruits of glory before the main body ar-

rived, which was to take possession of Scotland.

In addition to these precautions, the gates of Newcastle were shut, and all intercourse with the mutineers prohibited, as soon as the Earl of Gloucester (who undertook his usual character of mediator) had left the town. He addressed to the soldiers an argument best adapted to revive the slumbering sense of honour, namely, the advance of the first division of the army, who were now on the borders of Scotland. "Would you," said he, "desert your fellows, who have rushed before you, confident of your support, to disperse the half-formed array of the Lowlanders, and waste their resources, ere they have collected magazines, or driven off their herds to the mountains where the Highland chiefs are assembling their clans? And shall the vanguard relieve Stirling, sack Edinburgh, and again plant the lions of England on the heights

of Dumbarton; while you, brain-sick cavillers, will not suffer the soul of a Christian knight to take its flight to paradise, without turning inquisitors, and asking death whether he had his commission from heaven or from hell? Slanderers of your King, say was not Guy de Beauchamp a faithful subject; and have we now so many more true hearts than the state requires, that Majesty is itself compelled to thin the ranks of his brave captains, lest the Highland broad-sword should lose its edge ere it has mowed down the pride of England? My pennon is spread, and my spurs set for Scotland. Have ye commands for your comrades, whom I shall not overtake till they have passed the Cheviot hills? Shall I tell them they must be content with having the raven and the fox for their sexton, or commend them to be shrived by the first priest whom they may overtake hurrying to Bruce with tidings of the English inroad; or

shall I bear a flag of truce to the Scot, and, on condition of the vanguards becoming his bondsmen, procure you his passport to return safe to your own homes, where, over your anvils and ploughs, you may leisurely indict your King for murder, and resign, with his reputation, your national independence."

The Earl of Gloucester accompanied this harangue with correspondent actions. He dragged the factious orators from their rostrums, dispersed the listening auditory, drove the sentinels to their posts, and sternly reproved the subaltern commanders, who had suffered disaffection to rise to such a height without arresting its progress. Firmness always removes the danger which imbecility has created. The tide of opinion began its reflux: it was remarked that the King had a brave kinsman; the exploits of the house of De Clare were called to mind, and every soldier anticipated victory un-

der such a leader. Gloucester did not allow the enthusiasm he had enkindled to subside, but caused the trumpets to sound for Scotland; then carrying his banner in his own hand, advanced to the fords of the Tyne, passed the rocky channel, planted his ensign on the debateable land, and calling on all true hearts to follow him, and leave cowards and rebels to accuse their King and desert their chieftains, led the late mutinous but now loyal army to cope with their antient enemies.

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